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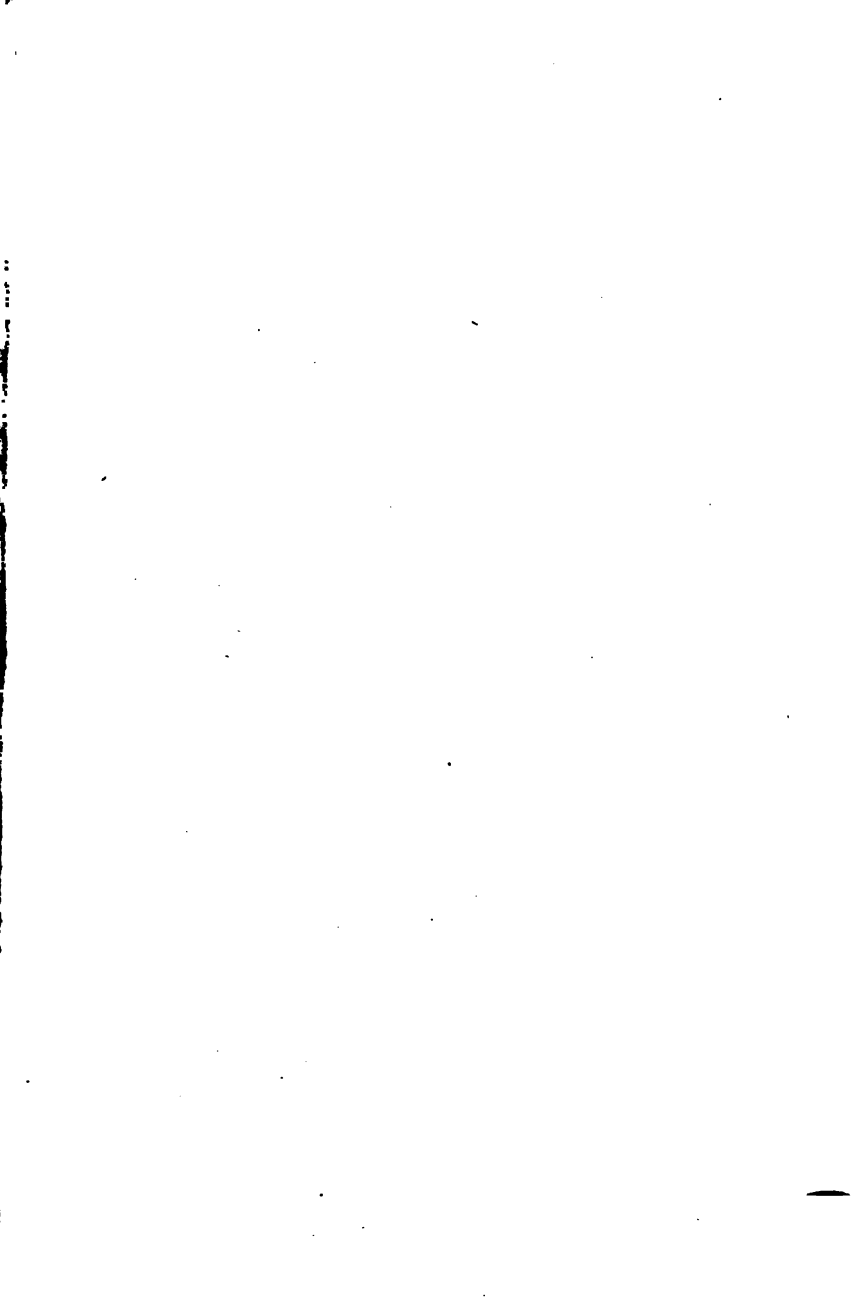
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J. H. Headlam.

KATHARINE ASHTON.

Elizabeth Missing Sewell

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT."

Pitch thy behaviour low — thy projects high. GEORGE HERBERT.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, LONGMANS, & ROBERTS.

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PREFACE.

It has been the Writer's object, in the following tale, to describe not so much what might or ought to be, as what actually is.

Questions constantly arise full of interest and importance, as to the best mode of meeting the necessities of the poor, and the various needs of our complex state of society. But they are full of great difficulty; and until they are determined by competent authority, it would seem safer and wiser, for women at least, rather to take advantage of the machinery placed within their reach than to criticise its defects, and speculate upon the means of its improvement. District societies may be less valuable than sisterhoods. A clergyman and his wife may be able to do less than clergymen living and working together as one body. But these are not questions for general consideration; and if we wait till we are able to decide them to our full satisfaction, the opportunities of usefulness around us will have escaped—never to be recalled.

It may be desirable to state, that the character of Katharine Ashton, although in no way intended to represent any particular individual, was suggested to the Writer by the circumstances of real life.



KATHARINE ASHTON.

CHAPTER I.

SOME thirty years ago there was to be seen at the lower end of the principal street, in the market town of Rilworth, in — shire, a substantial, brick, gable-ended house, standing back a little from the pavement, with an iron railing before it, and remarkable as being the only exception to the rows of shops which lined each side of the road, from the market-place in the centre of the town to the turnpike gate at its entrance. In other respects the building was in no way peculiar; it might have been the residence of the lawyer, or the doctor, or the banker, or the retired tradesman, contented with a moderate competency, and liking better to enjoy the society of his friends in the town than to live apart in rural exclusiveness. And such, probably, had been its original destination; but at the time to which reference has been made, the house was appropriated to a different purpose, and those who saw the troop of girls of all ages, from seven to fifteen, issuing from it about five o'clock in the evening, would at once have recognised the Gable House as a school, though they might not have known that it was commonly honoured by the title of *the* school, suggesting the idea that it was the only school in the place.

And such indeed it was, as regarded the more wealthy members of the little community of Rilworth, for the very obvious reason that no better instruction was within reach. From time immemorial it had been the custom of the Rilworth people to send their little girls to Miss Richardson's; some being glad to have their children taught French, and music, and fine work, without much expense; and others, more ambitious, considering that it was a

good thing to have them well grounded in reading, and writing, and arithmetic, and kept out of the way when they were of a troublesome age, and that a year or two afterwards at a finishing school would do all that was needful to fit them for general society.

To do Miss Richardson justice, she deserved the confidence reposed in her. She was a lady by birth and in feeling, not very well informed and only moderately clever, but strictly conscientious and impartial. If the children under her care did not know as much as might have been wished, they at least learnt correctly, and were made obedient and reverent. A foundation was laid upon which a good superstructure might be raised in after years. So thought the clergyman, and the lawyer, and the banker, and the brewer, and the coal merchant, and the wealthy linendraper, and many other influential persons in Rilworth, if they thought at all; and laying aside the strict barriers of exclusiveness, they all agreed in sending their children, when young, to Miss Richardson's.

Three little girls were standing on the school steps. They were nearly of the same age, between ten and eleven, dressed very much alike, each carrying a green baize bag, filled of course with books. They seemed hurried at first; probably they had the fear of being late before them; but the clock in the church tower pointed at five minutes to nine, and there were still some moments left for a little innocent gossip.

"How you did run! Jane," exclaimed the tallest of the three children, tapping one of her companions on the shoulder. The speaker was a bright-eyed, black-haired, rosy-cheeked girl, who might have been termed decidedly handsome, but it was not a beauty which gave pleasure. There was an absence of mind,—a certain flippancy of manner which was repelling. "How you did run!" she repeated again; "but Kate and I vowed we would overtake you, and we did." "My aunt was rather late for breakfast," replied Jane. "I should have been ready in good time else; at least, no, I should not; I had forgotten to sew a string on my bonnet last night, and that kept me." "Such a fidget! did you ever hear any thing like it, Kate? Why a pin does just as well as a string any day." "Not for my aunt, Selina," said Jane with a smile, which gave a singular brightness to a pale and rather melancholy face, older in its expression than belonged rightly to its age. The words were addressed to Selina, but the smile was for Katharine, and it was answered by another, less brilliant, yet scarcely less attractive from the air of thoughtfulness which accompanied it. "I wonder which is most right,—

to be late for school or to fasten your bonnet ribband with a pin," said Katharine. Jane laughed. "Most wrong, you mean: I don't suppose either of them is very wrong, but I like to do what my aunt tells me." "And what Miss Richardson tells you too, I suppose," exclaimed Selina: "run in, do; we shall all have forfeits if the bell rings." She rushed into the house, almost pushing Jane before her, and beckoning to Katharine to follow; but Katharine still lingered. She stood by the open door looking up the busy street. There was no mere curiosity in the gaze. It was practical, earnest, searching, as if she would fain satisfy herself in some great doubt or difficulty. "Yes, every body is busy," she said to herself as she closed the street door. "Certainly, but please don't think of them now, Kate. Hark! there is the bell," and Jane Sinclair's gentle hand was laid upon her arm. Katharine started, and hurried up the long passage to the little hall, where the cloaks and bonnets of the day-scholars were kept. "Go in, Jane; don't wait for me, I must be late." "No, no, you need not, there is always a minute's grace; the names are not being called over yet. Here, give me your bonnet, and let me hang it up." Selina had taken possession of the most convenient peg, and as she hastened past them to the schoolroom, she pointed to it, saying with a triumphant air, "First come, first served." "Herself first, always," muttered Katharine; but Jane made no remark, and only busied herself with contriving a place for Katharine's shawl upon an under peg in the corner. "The bell has stopped; go in, Kate, you will be just in time." Katharine hastened through the green baize door which opened into the schoolroom; her last glance showed Jane half buried beneath a heap of shawls and cloaks, which in her hurry she had disarranged. When the list was called over, a forfeit mark was placed against the name of Jane Sinclair.

The business of the morning began: lessons were said, generally very correctly;—small portions of Pinnock's Catechisms, columns of dictionary, and multiplication tables. Selina, or, as she was commonly called by her companions, Selly Fowler, ceased to be triumphant then. She was the lowest in the class when the lessons were ended; and as she went down and down, she cast a furtive glance upon Jane Sinclair, quietly pre-eminent at the top, and upon Katharine Ashton, who had risen three places, evidently fearing their ridicule. She need not have feared. Jane pitied her; Katharine did not think about her; she was intent upon the lessons, not upon the individuals who were repeating them. There was the same look of eager, almost troubled thought; and at times

she gazed around, asking, it seemed, for help, for explanation; but it was a vain request — understood by none, least of all by the even-minded, plodding Miss Richardson, who was fulfilling to the utmost what she felt to be her duty, whilst insisting upon the lessons being repeated perfectly, exercising strict justice, and enforcing instantaneous obedience.

“Jane Sinclair’s forfeit has put her second in the chance for the prize,” was the murmur that evening in the little ante-room, as the children were putting on their bonnets and cloaks. No one seemed glad, not even the tall, proud young lady, the daughter of the great brewer, who was by Jane’s misfortune placed above her. “She was very sorry,” she said — “she would much rather they had been equal; besides it was such a stupid way of gaining a prize, because some one else was late.” “Better that way than no way,” exclaimed Selina, as she tossed Katharine’s bonnet to her across the ante-room. The bonnet fell to the ground, for Katharine Ashton was turning away to speak to Jane. “You must let me tell Miss Richardson how it happened. Jane; it would be too bad to lose the prize when this is your last half; she will be sure to put you up again, for it was all because you helped me.” “No good to trust to that, Kate,” said Jane, with a merry laugh; “but why trouble about it? we can never help others if we won’t take a risk.” Jane tied her bonnet with quiet unconcern, but there was a tear in Katharine Ashton’s dark eye, and she walked away without uttering another word.

When the little school party, who went together to the upper end of the High Street, separated, Selina Fowler rushed like a whirlwind up the flight of steps which led to the tall house with the bright green door marked with the name of Mr. Robert Fowler, surgeon and dentist. Katharine walked slowly to the private entrance to Ashton’s, the large bookseller and stationer’s; and Jane pursued her way a little beyond the town, to the row of small houses standing in little gardens, one of which was the residence of her maiden aunt, and, for the present, her home.

CHAPTER II.

“MOTHER,” said Katharine Ashton, as she sat at work in the parlour behind the shop, trying to make the best use of the few remaining minutes of daylight, “do you know I saw Miss

Sinclair to-day, as I went up the street? I think she must be going to live here for good, she has been staying here so long."

Eight years had passed since Katharine and Jane were school-fellows. Eight years will make great changes in habits and feelings, but they are more obvious to the spectators than to the individuals concerned. It was as natural now for Katharine to speak of Miss Sinclair as it had been once to talk of Jane. "Mr. Fowler told your father, a month ago, that Mrs. Sinclair had taken the house with the green verandah, opposite St. Peter's," replied Mrs. Ashton, without raising her eyes from the winter dress she was diligently employed in altering. "She was turning down towards St. Peter's when I saw her," continued Katharine; "I just caught one look of her face. How she is altered! — I should scarcely have known her if Selina had not pointed her out; I dare say she does not recollect me." A half sigh escaped Katharine as she said this, but it was not perceived by her mother. "Of course not, Kate, any more than you would remember her. Have you finished that seam yet?" "Yes, nearly; but, mother, do you really think I am so changed?" "Why, you are grown into a woman, child, and so is Miss Sinclair; and she has been away now — let me see — eight years; they stayed here just twelve months, I think, after she left the school." "Her aunt, Miss Maurice, did — not Jane; she was sent away to some cousin, people said," replied Katharine; "and then after that we heard that Captain Sinclair was dead, and that Mrs. Sinclair was returned from India." "Ah, yes, I remember, — that was some time ago;" and Mrs. Ashton, having completed her task, carefully folded up her work, and began to clear the table, saying, at the same time, "Your father talked of wanting you to help him look over Lowe's account this evening, Kate, so we must have tea early." — "John promised to do that," said Katharine, "but I suppose he won't be in." — "He told me he should most likely go up to Mr. Fowler's," replied Mrs. Ashton; "it is very kind of them to take so much notice of him." Katharine did not echo the feeling; she worked on in silence — not melancholy, but thoughtful silence; — for she was not really altered. There was the change from the round-faced, awkward child of eleven, to the intelligent, keen-sighted, energetic girl of eighteen; but the expression of the face was unaltered, and so was the mind.

Katharine Ashton was often called pretty, but that was not exactly the proper term to apply to her. There were many girls of her age in Rilworth with much more regular features. Hap-

pily for her she had never attracted notice as a child, and so she had grown up without any thought, whether she was good-looking or not. Perhaps that constituted one of her chief attractions. She never troubled herself about what would be said of her; she had no self-consciousness; and no one, therefore, was afraid of wounding her vanity or giving offence. It was impossible not to be at ease with her, because she was quite at ease with herself. "Kate Ashton is such a very sensible, good-natured girl," was the general remark of mothers who were anxious for their own children, and therefore were always forming comparisons; and Mrs. Ashton herself had never advanced beyond this opinion. She was not, indeed, a person likely to wish Katharine to be any thing more. She was herself a farmer's daughter, educated in the old times, when it was the custom for farmers' wives and children to make butter and cheese themselves, instead of leaving the work to servants; and her chief idea of a woman's excellence consisted in keeping regular accounts, working quickly and neatly, and making good pies and puddings. She had sent Katharine to Miss Richardson's, and she had allowed her to learn a little French and music, but it was sorely against her own judgment; in fact, she had only satisfied her conscience by considering that it was what every one did now, and that, indeed, if Katharine did not go there, she could not go any where.

Mrs. Ashton was not as ambitious as her husband, but she certainly had not as much temptation to be so. He was a great man in his way. Rilworth was a very central town, and he was the chief bookseller and stationer in it. His shop was the common meeting-place for parties who came in from the country for a day's business. It was a charming lounge for idlers; for all the new publications were to be seen there, to say nothing of a reading-room attached to the shop, and a good circulating library. No one ever thought of driving into Rilworth without making the excuse to call at Ashton's for something, and no one ever went away without feeling considerable cordiality towards the obliging, deferential, smiling Mr. Ashton, who had a word of interest for all his customers, and every species of temptation for their taste or their needs, from the smooth octavo in clear type and broad margin, destined for the learned repose of the library, to the little magazine in its yellow paper cover, pronounced to be exactly suited for the servants' hall.

And Mr. Ashton was an important person also, beyond the limits of his shop. He was a member of the town council, and considered a great authority in all municipal questions. He was

a charity commissioner, a guardian of the poor; his name was one of the foremost on the sanitary committee, the national school committee, fourth only in the list of the patrons of the mendicity society; above all, he had for many successive years filled the office of churchwarden, and had appropriated to himself a splendid pew curtained and lined in the middle aisle, exactly opposite the pulpit.

Mr. Ashton was of course a very busy man; too busy it may be thought for the success of his shop. That might or might not be. People said, that he was wealthy, and could afford it; and then he had an excellent foreman,—grave, subdued, silent, always at his post. It was a very punctual, well-ordered shop; and whilst this continued, no one was inclined to inquire whether Mr. Ashton thought it necessary thoroughly to fulfil the offices which he undertook, or whether he was contented only with the glory to be derived from them. Of his private affairs none beyond the circle of his immediate friends in the same position of life as himself knew any thing. Mrs. Ashton sat in the back parlour, and made her own dresses and mended her husband's shirts, and Katharine often worked nearly as hard as the foreman in making out accounts, and was always the person to assist in unpacking the London parcels, but in the shop she was never seen. "I won't have my daughter dancing about in the shop with long curls and a furbelowed gown," was Mr. Ashton's reply to a neighbour who once inquired why he did not make Kate more useful. "Other people would as soon fly as let their girls be at the beck and call of every idle youngster, and why am I not to be as careful of my Kate?" There might have been some pride in Mr. Ashton's determination, but it was a safe and wise one. Katharine Ashton seated at work in the back parlour, had as much simple dignity of manner as the most refined lady in the land. Almost too much to please her mother, who declared she was not a bit like other girls of her age, and people would think she was set up if she kept so quiet; but not too much to please her father, who, from a more extensive knowledge of the world, felt instinctively the value of his child's delicacy of mind, though he only appreciated it as making her look, as he said, like a lady. And this was all that was known or thought of Katharine Ashton, that she was a good, sensible, quiet girl; possibly a little inclined to be proud, but upon the whole very right-minded.

And was this all that was hidden beneath that self-possessed manner, that quick, varying expression of eye, that singular smile of inward thoughtfulness?

Katharine's history may be the best reply.

Tea was brought in by the maid-servant, and Mr. Ashton was called in from the shop. He came in with a smiling face, and stood rubbing his hands over the fire. "Colonel Forbes will have a cold drive home to-night: I can't say I envy him. Here, Kate, give me my chair, and draw the table nearer." "Has Colonel Forbes bought that book of the coloured birds?" asked Mrs. Ashton. "All but: he stickles a little at the price, but he will have it by and by; he says he shall call again to-morrow." "Seven guineas is a large price to give for one book," observed Katharine, who was seated opposite to the fire, pouring out the tea. "Not when there is a lady in the case, Kitty, my child," said Mr. Ashton with a meaning smile. "Foolish things you women make us do,—hey, wife? isn't it so?" And he stooped down and gave his wife a hearty kiss. "It is a good many years I hope since you did any foolish thing for me, Mr. Ashton, if that's what you mean," was the reply; "but what are you talking about? what has Colonel Forbes to do with a lady?"—"Why, not much in the present tense we may suppose," said Mr. Ashton, who prided himself upon being rather a grammarian, "but a good deal in the future. By the by, Kitty, his intended is an old friend of yours. I think I shall tell the Colonel so some day if he gets uppish as he is inclined to do."—"A friend of mine, father," said Katharine, "why I never had any friend."—"I thought you chits at school made friends with every one," replied Mr. Ashton. "Didn't I use to hear you talk of Jane Sinclair?"—"Oh! yes, Miss Sinclair,—yes I remember," and Katharine slightly blushed; "but I could not call her my friend exactly, she was only there three quarters of a year, because her aunt was ill, and no one knew what to do with her, and I have not seen her since."—"And she is grown a fine lady now," said Mrs. Ashton; "they say, that Captain Sinclair had heaps of grand relations, who never did any thing for him whilst he was living; but since his death some one has left Miss Sinclair a tolerable fortune."—"Oh! that is the reason then that they are going to live in that large house," said Katharine. "I thought just now, mother, when you told me of it, that they must be rich; but when Miss Sinclair lived with her aunt, it was in a very poky way,—at least so Selina said."—"Just like her, knowing every thing about every body's affairs," said Mr. Ashton. "Mrs. Ashton, what do you say to your son John taking up so much with Miss Selly Fowler?"—"I think my son John must manage his own concerns," said Mrs. Ashton. "He is only like all other

young men." — "But I don't think Selly would make him a good wife," observed Katharine. "She is too grand a great deal; and I know Mr. Fowler thinks it quite a condescension to ask John to the house." — "Heigh!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, with a whistle of surprise, "condescension, indeed! why his father was a farmer like mine, and the girl has not a penny. I wonder what he will say if it comes to a question of settlements." — "Oh father!" exclaimed Katharine, "you don't mean that there can be ever any thing serious between John and Selina." — "Why not, child!" — "Why not?" Katharine's cheek became crimson with eagerness and nervousness. "I don't know that I can tell exactly, but I was at school with her." — "So much the more reason for being her friend, I should think," replied Mr. Ashton. — "Yes, if I liked her, and thought she was worth any thing. But, father, John ought to marry some one who would put him up in the world." — "Well, Kate," observed Mrs. Ashton, "for that matter I don't know what John could do better. Mrs. Fowler has a cousin a clergyman, and they visit at Captain Store's and Mr. Blgrave's, and I know at the hunt last year Mr. Fowler was asked to dine at Sir John Keene's."

"But it is not sure that John will be asked too," replied Katharine; "besides, I don't think, mother, you quite know what I mean, and I don't think I can explain to you."

"And there is no time now," remarked Mr. Ashton, "for here comes Master John himself."

The door was thrown open rather roughly, and a young man about three-and-twenty years of age entered the room. He was good-looking; more so perhaps, strictly speaking, than his sister, whom he strongly resembled; but there was an air of slang about him, which was very unpleasant when contrasted with Katharine's quiet simplicity. His black curling hair had long been allowed to remain uncut, and his whiskers were ferocious. He wore a short, sportsman-like coat, and a blue cravat, loosely tied, which displayed more of his brown throat than was quite agreeable to the eye. A strong scent of cigars accompanied him, so strong that Mrs. Ashton's first exclamation was: "John, don't bring any of those nasty smoking things in here." — "Haven't got any, mother," replied John, seizing the first chair at hand, and seating himself at the table. "Kitty, give us a cup of tea." — "It is rather cold, John, I am afraid," said Katharine; "wait a few minutes, and let me make the water boil." She stirred the fire, and lifted the heavy tea-kettle; her brother not offering to help her, but sitting with his right leg crossed over his knee, humming

a tune. "Well, John," said Mr. Ashton, "how have you and Miss Selly been getting on to-day?" — "Selly's a goose," replied John, rather pettishly. — "And is this the first time you have found that out, John dear?" said Katharine, with rather a malicious smile. "I can't think what makes you girls so envious of one another," exclaimed John; "as soon as ever one of you has a civil word said to her, the others are all up in arms. Selly may not have such a way of keeping accounts as you have, Kate; but she's never been bred up to it; as she said to me to-day, she's a lady; and, as I said to her, she's a handsome one. If you live to be a hundred, Kate, you will never be half what she is." — "I don't suppose I shall," said Katharine, laughing; "when people live to be a hundred, they are generally not very remarkable for beauty. However, John, I don't at all dispute Selina's good looks, only," — she stopped, prudently, most likely, — but the ostensible reason was because the water in the tea-kettle was boiling over. "Now, let me make you a bit of toast," she said, after pouring the water into the teapot; "there will be just time whilst the tea is brewing." John seemed mollified by the attention, and cut off the slice of bread himself to save her the trouble, remarking as he handed it to her, that she was the best maker of toast in Rilworth. The compliment, it is to be hoped, repaid Katharine for the scorching heat of the fire before which she knelt, as her brother certainly had little mercy upon her; his appetite for toast, especially such toast as Katharine could make, was prodigious. Mr. Ashton lingered in the room for some time, half amused and half impatient; but as John applied himself to the third round, he exclaimed, "Well, John, my boy, it is to be hoped that good eating is good preparation for work: there is the last London parcel to be unpacked and sorted to-night; and it's high time you should begin." — "Dick Fowler and I are going to the lecture at the Institution," said John, carelessly. "Well! that's half-past seven," said his father, "and it is now a quarter past six; there will be plenty of time, if you send off all this rubbish," — and he gave a push to the tea-tray; "Kate will read the invoice."

"I dare say I could do it all, if it was necessary," said Katharine, good-humouredly; "Susan will help me unpack." — "That foreman of mine, Dawes, ought to have been in to-night," said Mr. Ashton; "but he's engaged too, he tells me. I can't imagine what all you young men are made of, to be thinking of so many things besides your work." — "Do you want your accounts this evening, father?" said Katharine, attempting to lift a large

mahogany desk, which stood on a table near the fireplace. Mr. Ashton hesitated a little — “No; I think not. I have rather a notion, — did Dick Fowler say if his father was going to the gas committee to-night, John?” — “He talked something about it, I did not exactly understand what,” answered John; “but I know Mr. Fowler is up about it, for Dick told me Colonel Forbes was going to take a share.” — “That reminds me” — Mr. Ashton turned quickly to his daughter — “There is a set of books, which I promised the Colonel should be sent over to him by the van to-morrow early, so mind you put them up to-night, Kitty; I will show you which they are presently.” Mr. Ashton went into the shop. Mrs. Ashton said she must fetch some more work; and Katharine also lighted a candle, and was going away, when her brother pulled her back, — “Stop, Kate, I want to have five words with you.” Katharine put down her candle, and went back to the fireplace. “What do you mean by always putting in such provoking words about Selly?” began John. “Because I think them, I am afraid,” replied Kate, quickly; “you know, John, she really is not worth your having except just for her pretty face.” — “And the connection,” said John; “you forget that, Kitty. She is a peg above us any day.” — “That is just what I doubt, John,” said Katharine. “My father thinks so, I know; he never would let you think of her else, because she has no money; but, somehow, I never can get out of my mind that you, and I, and all of us, are worth quite as much in the world as she is. That is pride, I dare say; it is wrong, too, I dare say. I wish I could be quite sure though that it was,” — and the dreamy, inward look peculiar to Katharine’s face passed over it for a moment. “I don’t understand all that backwards and forwards work, Kitty,” replied John. “I only know that Selly visits people who won’t take any notice of us; and what’s more, too, I know she won’t have any thing to say to me whilst I stand behind a counter, and that’s what I want to talk to you about.” — “My dear John!” and Katharine, looked distressed, for her quick mind had caught in a moment a whole train of troubles consequent upon this new idea. “Well! my dear Kate!” he patted her shoulder, and with a hesitating laugh, added, “why am I not to be a gentleman, if I can be? There’s old Andrews means to give up business soon, and be as grand as the grandest.” — “Where is the money to come from?” asked Katharine? — “That is another question, and a sensible one,” observed John, approvingly. “You mustn’t think I’ve not thought of that, little Kitty.” — “And what are you going to do to make yourself

a gentleman?" asked Kate, whilst a smile played upon her lips, which was not quite flattering to her brother's self-love. "You don't take to the notion I see, Kitty," he continued, drawing up his head, "but what is to hinder me from having a little business of my own?—a farm, we'll say. My father would let me have the money to stock it; and Selly and I might live to ourselves quite quietly. Mr. Fowler wouldn't object to that as he would to the shop."

The movement of Katharine's foot had betrayed considerable impatience during this speech; there was a sparkle in her eye too, which indicated something very like temper. John paused, but heard no reply. "Well, Kate! child! what are you thinking of!"—"I don't know; I can't say, John."—"Won't it do?" John looked at her anxiously; he had more trust in her judgment than he would have been willing to acknowledge. "It might do if Selly was not in the question, and if she wasn't, you would never have thought of it."—"For pity's sake speak out, Kate; how can one make sense of such ins and outs?" Katharine's quick glance was quieted now, and she said calmly, "I would speak out, John, if I thought you would understand me, or if I really understood myself. I don't go with you, that you know; I don't want to be what you call a lady, or to see you what you would think a gentleman. I would rather be myself, and see you yourself; and I don't like Selly for putting you up to being different. I think it is one of her senseless notions, and I can't stand it, and it makes me cross, and I wish you had never had any thing to do with her. So now, perhaps, I had better not give any opinion about the farm."—"Oh yes, speak up," said John, a little sulkily. Katharine still hesitated. "Well, if I must—I dare say I don't know much about such things,—but it seems to me that if people want to be farmers, they should know something about farming;" and again Katharine's smile was a very little satirical. "They can learn, I suppose," said John. "Yes; but then if a man takes a farm to learn upon, and finds he can't learn, what is to become of him, when he has married upon the chance of succeeding?"—"That's all nonsense, Kitty, every one must have a beginning; and Selly and I could live upon as little as we chose."—"But don't you think, John," continued Katharine; "that it is a pity you did not take to this farming rather earlier, if you are so bent upon it? What was the good of all the bookkeeping, and summing, and reading you had at school, if you are going now to give it all up?"—"All that is nothing to the point, Kate; what I say is, that I can't ask Selly Fowler to marry me, if I am going to stand

behind a counter; and so take a farm I must, for there is nothing else to be done." Katharine took refuge in silence. "And you don't choose to talk to my father about it for me then?" said John; Katharine laughed; she could not help it. "Of course not, my dear John, what could make you think I should?"—"Why, because you are a good-natured chit, and have helped me out of difficulties before."—"There is no occasion to get into this one," replied Katharine gravely; "so if I promised to help you beforehand, it would be leading you in, not out. Seriously, John," she continued,—and she put her arm round his neck, and looked into his face with a smile of arch but winning sweetness,—“you must listen to reason for one minute. What are you to do with a farm, and what is Selly to do? She can't make butter and cheese.”—"No, indeed, I should never wish her to do so."—"Well, then," continued Katharine, "if she can't she must pay some one who can, and so she must keep farm servants, and house servants, and loads of people to help her, and who is to pay for it all? You can't do it, John, really you can't. Selly is not the wife for you if you take a farm, any more than if you keep a shop. You are not like a person who can give her plenty of money and let her sit idle all day. Your wife, John, must work."—"She shan't, though," said John impatiently.—"Then she must starve," replied Katharine, with a quick laugh; "have we not all been brought up to work?"—"Yes, work as a gentleman—that I have no objection to," observed John; "but not behind a counter."—"And why not? why are not people just as good behind a counter as before one?" asked Katharine. "It is so mean to care about it, like being ashamed of one's relations. You mustn't mind my saying so, John, but I can't bear Selly for putting such notions into your head; and if I can't tell why they are wrong, yet I am sure they are wrong, and mean, and low, and they make me proud. They make me long to go and stand in the shop myself, and show Selly that I am not above doing what my father does, and what my grandfather did before him." John turned away. "I have been cross, John, I know. Please forgive me. Don't go away without a kiss." Katharine followed him to the door to stop him. John looked at her kindly, even respectfully. "I can't think as you do, Kate. I don't say it might not be better if I did."—"You might be good for so much, John, I am sure," continued Katharine, earnestly; "you were made to be good for a great deal: father says so often, only,"—she seemed very much afraid of proceeding, but the expression of John's face was softer and more thoughtful,—“only if you could be one thing, what you

are ; — not two things, trying to be something else, or letting Selly persuade you into trying. You might be like Charlie Ronaldson, whom my father was praising so the other night, if you would." — "What ! that solemn black-looking prig, with his cropped hair and his books ; no, defend me from that !" — "I think the scissors would do good though," said Katharine, playfully. "Even George Andrews does not wear his hair as long as you do." — "By the by, George Andrews and all his party are to be at the Institute to-night," exclaimed John ; "Why don't you come too, Kate ?" "The London parcel, and the invoice, and the books for Colonel Forbes," was Katharine's reply. John delayed, perhaps his conscience reproached him for leaving her to work alone, but he did not betray the feeling if he had it, and merely said, as he went away, "It's one of Colonel Forbes' farms that would just suit me."

Katharine began to unpack the parcel by herself. It was cold work in a back room, or rather closet, without a fire, but she did not think of that, she was too busy ; yet the business, upon the whole, went on slowly ; her mind was not thoroughly given to it. She thought of a great many things whilst she was taking out books and putting aside the sheets of brown paper in which they were wrapped. Sometimes of her conversation with John and her anxiety for him, and of Selina Fowler and her foolish education and absurd fancies ; and occasionally of more abstract subjects, but the latter were more feelings than thoughts ; she scarcely realised them to herself, only they gave her rather a feeling of depression, as if there was something in her kept down, imprisoned, as if there might be some object or aim in life which she ought to have, and had not. She did not exactly ask herself what use there was in unpacking books, but she wondered what was the good of reading them, what made the people write them, what made any one do any thing, in fact. Many of the books were new novels ; she looked into them and they amused her, but it was an unsatisfactory peep, because she did not venture to uncut the leaves. A few, however, were for the circulating library, and these she seized upon with avidity more for her mother than herself. Mrs. Ashton was very fond of a novel when it could be read out to her, and if they were not both very much engaged in work, Katharine often took one from the library to read aloud. She could find a good deal of amusement in the books generally, and she thought reading aloud a very agreeable way of pleasing her mother ; but the novels were just as perplexing as real life. People fell in love, and after a good deal of fuss were married at last, of course, like every one else ; but afterwards they went on

just as before, eating and drinking, and sleeping, and talking to the end—till death. There was no difference that Katharine could see in any rank. If the people she read of were gentlemen and ladies, they lived in country houses, and gave large parties, and the gentlemen went out hunting and shooting, and the ladies worked worsted work; but there was no more use in that, as far as Katharine could see, than there was in her own employment, kneeling down upon the floor, in a back room, unpacking a parcel. She could not wish to change with them, she did not think it would make her happier—no, she was useful where she was, pleasing her father and mother, making her home cheerful. She ought to be happy, and she was happy. Yet at the very moment Katharine said this to herself, there was a painful sense of nothingness, of want of interest at her heart, which made her rush back to her work in order that she might forget it.

The box was unpacked, the books were ranged in order on the floor, ready to be carried into the shop the next morning. Only Colonel Forbes' parcel remained to be put up. Her father had left the list of books in the parlour, and Katharine went in to fetch it. She found her mother sitting in the arm-chair, having fallen asleep over her work. The snuff of the mould candle had grown very tall, and looked really alarming in its vicinity to the yards of linen which lay upon the oil-cloth table cover. Katharine's entrance woke Mrs. Ashton. She was not very clear as to the hour, and, rubbing her eyes, inquired in a drowsy voice if it was tea-time. "Bed-time, you mean, mother," said Katharine; "it is pretty near ten—half-past nine, that is,—won't you have supper?"—"Better wait for your father; he said he shouldn't be late," replied Mrs. Ashton; and she sat up, and taking her spectacles, set to work again, as diligently as if she had never left off. "Mother," said Katharine, as she watched her, "I wish I could go on stitching and sewing as you do: I should get dreadfully tired if I had as much to do."—"Wait till you are as old as I am, Kitty, and then you won't want to be fidgeting about; when I was your age I was not half as steady as you are now."—"They are shirts, aren't they?" said Katharine, taking up the work. "A set for John," replied Mrs. Ashton, "and, by the time they are done, there will be a set wanted for your father;—plenty to do, isn't there, Kitty?"—"Plenty," replied Katharine, thoughtfully; "but one shouldn't be happy, I suppose, without it."—"No; of course not," replied Mrs. Ashton; "what were we sent into the world for except to work? Why, when I was a girl I was up at half-past four as often as not, and about in the dairy, and

looking after all the farm people. My mother never bred me up to be an idle lady, any more than I have bred you up, Kate;—a good, useful girl—that's what your father and I always set our hearts upon your being.”—“I wonder what Miss Sinclair is?” said Katharine, who was standing with her eyes fixed upon the list of books for Colonel Forbes. “Miss Sinclair, Kitty! what on earth makes you think of her?”—“Only that, I suppose, some of these books are for her,” observed Katharine smiling; “they don't seem to be much of a gentleman's choice.”—“Oh! very likely; paying court,” said Mrs. Ashton, with a meaning nod; “we shall see you having fine things given you some of these days, Kitty.”—“Perhaps so,” replied Katharine in the tone of one who scarcely knew that she was addressed. “Jane—Miss Sinclair—was always given to reading and learning lessons at Miss Richardson's,” she added; “I suppose she is much the same now.”—“She has nothing else to do in the world,” said Mrs. Ashton; “reading is very well for young ladies who have plenty of servants to manage every thing for them.”—“Jane Sinclair read when her aunt only kept one servant,” observed Katharine; “and she was going to learn all kinds of things besides. I dare say she can talk French quite well now.”—“Well, Kate,” said Mrs. Ashton—perceiving, as she fancied, a slight amount of discontent in her daughter's voice—“and so can you talk French too. You asked that old beggar, the other day, where he came from, which was more, I am sure, than I could do.”—“I am afraid my French would not help me much if I were to go to France,” answered Katharine, good-humouredly; “but as I am likely to stay in England all my life, I suppose it will not much signify. Perhaps, mother, it was a pity we troubled about it when I was at Miss Richardson's! it is not likely to be any good to me.”—“Your father and I liked you to learn what other girls learnt,” said Mrs. Ashton; “and Matty Andrews thought so much about it—that was what put us up to giving you a few months of it.”—“Matty is a fine lady,” said Katharine; “I suppose French is good for fine ladies. But, mother, I don't want to be any thing but myself,—only, I should like to be the best of myself.” Mrs. Ashton stared at Katharine for a moment, through her spectacles, and then her eyes went down again to her work. The speech was mystifying, like others which she occasionally heard. Katharine knew that well. There is nothing we are sooner aware of than the fact of not being understood; and she went back into silence, or, rather, into a meditation upon Colonel Forbes' list, and very soon after returned to the back room to put up the parcel.

CHAPTER III.

THE large house with the green verandah, opposite St. Peter's church, was one of the best in Rilworth. It was so good, indeed, that it had long remained unoccupied, because no one could afford to take it; or, at least, the persons who could do so did not choose to settle in a country town. What made Mrs. Sinclair fix upon it, was not supposed to be known, though it was guessed at. The ostensible reason was, to please Jane, who had a remembrance of her childish days in the place, and thought it would be pleasant to recall them. It was an agreeable home, at any rate, for Mrs. Sinclair for a time. The contrast between what her position now was and what she had feared it would be when left with only the pension of an officer's widow, could not but be agreeable even to one who had suffered so much, and was so thoroughly unworldly. It was a great comfort to feel that economy was not always the first thing to be thought of, that it was allowable to be lavish in charity and hospitality. It was delightful to be able to encourage Jane's generous plans, and only check them with consideration of prudence for others, not of care for herself. Mrs. Sinclair was just the person to enjoy this freedom and be thankful for it. Yet she was not looking quite happy now; she was grave, and her glance at Jane, who sat in the library, writing a long letter, was very anxious. Jane did not perceive it; she was too much engrossed in her occupation. She also was looking grave, but it was a very different gravity from her mother's; it was the thoughtfulness of one who was just beginning to view life truly and seriously, who had probably been newly awakened to a sense of its responsibilities; yet there was no anxiety in it, but rather gladness and hope, and bright confidence. Her pen moved rapidly.

"I am very happy," she wrote, "more happy than I was two months ago. Every thing was confusing then, but now I am beginning to understand the future, to feel how solemn and yet how full of joy it is. At times I trouble myself with fears which you would laugh at; you have such trust in me, so much more than I can have in myself. I must one day tell you the history of my past life, not its events (for they have been very few), but its feelings. I shall think then that you will judge me truly, and be better able to make allowance for me. I never knew till now what an oppression the weight of undeserved praise might be.

But I try to think that it is not praise from you but love,—and then I can bear it better; for I feel that I can return it. I know that I can see no fault in you, and so I can better bear that you should look blindly upon me. Perhaps though, it would be better if we could see each other truly. Have you any faults? I do try seriously to believe that you have, mamma tells me I must. She says, if I dream too much now, there will some day be a sorrowful wakening; but I would rather dream, I must do so, for I could not live without it, and I have no fear. Come what may, one thing can never change—our love.”

So Jane Sinclair wrote two months after she had consented to be the wife of Colonel Forbes, of Maplestead. Nineteen was very young to be married; no wonder that Mrs. Sinclair looked anxious. And Jane had known so little of her future husband! Six months before they had been perfect strangers; three months before only intimate acquaintances! When Mrs. Sinclair looked back, she could scarcely trace the steps by which the engagement had been reached. She knew only that Jane had been thrown more especially into the society of Colonel Forbes at the house of a friend, when she herself was compelled to be absent, in attendance upon a dying relation, and that, on her return, the offer was made openly and honourably, and accepted timidly, but willingly. There could be no reasonable objection. Colonel Forbes had character, position, fortune, every thing which in the eyes of the world could render the connection desirable. Jane said he had also deep-seated, sterling principle, and her mother saw no reason to doubt it. Yet who would not have trembled to trust the gentle, shrinking, sensitive girl of nineteen to the stern, commanding, polished man of the world, twelve years her senior?

Mrs. Sinclair begged for a delay in the engagement, but certainty was Colonel Forbes' necessity. If he could not have certainty, he would have despair, and Mrs. Sinclair yielded; more however, to Jane's tearful eyes and pale cheeks than to the urgent demands of the Colonel. She could have opposed his words, but she could not oppose Jane's sorrowful but dutiful submission, and the engagement was ratified, subject only to the condition, that three months should elapse before the marriage.

“Colonel Forbes will not be here to-day, Jane, I think you said,” observed Mrs. Sinclair, as she watched the rapid progress of Jane's pen.—“No, not till to-morrow—to-morrow at four; he will not return from London till then. He asked if we would walk on the Maplestead Road to meet him, and I am writing to tell him we will.” Mrs. Sinclair smiled. It was a very long

message for such a simple announcement, three pages at least. "It is a happy thing you can write, Jane," she said; "Colonel Forbes would never have known any thing about you without writing."—"No, only facts," replied Jane, and her voice had an accent of sadness. "He scolds me for it a little now; he says I am so different from my letters; but I mean to talk to him by and by, mamma, just as I do to you."—"I trust so, my child," but Mrs. Sinclair was not very confident in her tone. She dreaded Jane's timidity and reserve of manner. It would not suit all people; it might not suit Colonel Forbes. The coldness would be too like himself. Yet he must have seen through it quickly, or he would not have ventured to risk his happiness by the offer he had made. If it were only possible to search into people's hearts to know what it was which influenced them! Mrs. Sinclair need not have been perplexed upon that point. Any person who looked at Jane would have seen quite sufficient to account for the fascination she had exercised. It was not regular beauty which was her charm, but exquisite refinement. She was so slight and delicate, so graceful and quiet, one could scarcely have desired any change except it might be a tinge of deeper colour in the pale cheek, and something of greater animation in the blue dreamy eye. Perhaps, too, some might have required more warmth of expression; for although all who knew Jane well, knew also the quickness and depth of her feelings, there were many who did not know her, and said they never could, and they were cold in manner in consequence, and frightened Jane, and threw her back more into herself, and so the evil increased. But Jane did not see its full extent yet. She had her mother to love her, and many dear friends who understood her, and one especially, who was only too willing to make her his idol, and so she lived in her own happy world, and gave no thought to what might be beyond.

"I must give up to-day, mamma, to business," said Jane, as at length she laid down her pen, and folded up her letter. "If we are to walk to Maplestead to-morrow, I must go and see my old women this afternoon."—"Mrs. Reeves is disconsolate at the notion of your going away, Jane," said Mrs. Sinclair, "she thought you were going to be her right hand."—"Not a very strong one, I am afraid," replied Jane, laughing; "she will be badly off if she has nothing better to depend upon."—"I suspect she has not very much," observed Mrs. Sinclair; "there is no one scarcely living in Rilworth who can do any thing. Mr. Reeves says it puts him in despair."—"He always finds fault with Rilworth," said

Jane; "I don't like him for that. I am sure the people are much better than he fancies; but he cannot know much about them, for he is only just come."—"I dare say they may be good in their way," replied Mrs. Sinclair, "only Mr. Reeves cannot get at them; and one thing every one must see—the subscriptions are miserable."—"Colonel Forbes means to subscribe to the Rilworth charities," said Jane. "I asked him about them the other day, and he said of course whatsoever I was interested in he should be delighted to assist; so Mr. Reeves may be happy on that point. Dear mamma, why do you look so grave?"—"Because money is so much, and does so little, my child," replied her mother; "and because, living in a country town, one cannot help feeling it. I wonder, Jane, what has become of all those young girls you used to talk to me about years ago."—"Yes, Kate, and Selina, and Matty," and Jane ran over a long list of names—"so odd it is to remember how one used to know all about them, and now they have passed away, quite out of one's sight. I don't like to think of that: I don't wish to forget any one I have ever been with."—"That is a young thought, Jane. Life is not long enough to remember every one."—"They were very good-natured girls, and clever, too, some of them," continued Jane, pursuing the current of her own ideas; "I should like to know what they have turned out."—"Nothing very valuable, I am afraid," said Mrs. Sinclair, "according to Mr. Reeves' account of the Sunday dress."—"Yes, that is surprising, certainly," observed Jane: "I remember now, I did see one of them last Sunday as we were going to church—Selina Fowler, and such a gay bonnet she had! flowers outside and inside; I knew her directly, because she was so exactly what she was at school: but they were not all like her, mamma. There were some very sensible, right-thinking girls; I dare say they would help Mr. Reeves, if he would ask them."—"Some of them do help him in the Sunday school, I believe," said Mrs. Sinclair, "but they are so fanciful, they do not like to be interfered with; and they are always taking offence, thinking that some slight is intended. It must be very difficult to know what to do with them."

"Why should people think that others, especially such clergymen as Mr. Reeves, intend to be rude to them?" said Jane thoughtfully.—"Because they are trying to move beyond their position," replied Mrs. Sinclair, "and they are conscious of it. People are always then on the *qui vive* for any neglect. What we all want to learn is the meaning of that sentence in the catechism, 'to do our duty in that state of life to which God has called us,' and not in any other."

"Then, mamma," said Jane, playfully, "I had better put on my bonnet, and go out to my old women; and so give me a kiss, and wish me good bye, and hope that they won't have dreadful tales to tell of each other, for that makes me more unhappy than any thing."

CHAPTER IV.

JANE walked into High Street, and when she reached the upper end turned into a narrow lane that led into the country. Just beyond was a row of old picturesque almshouses; they formed a portion of a small district, which had been given her in charge by Mr. Reeves, the Vicar of Rilworth. Jane did not think she was doing any vast amount of good by undertaking a district. She was only a learner, and the work offered her was much less than it would have been in other parts of the town, and consisted chiefly in reading to the old women who could not go to church, and reporting special cases of sickness and distress to Mr. Reeves. Yet it was work; it was something definite, and under rule, and Jane could better bear to hear, as she was beginning to hear, of sin and suffering, when she felt that, as far as in her lay, she was doing something, however slight, to relieve it.

Since her return to Rilworth she had sometimes felt that life in a country town—in any town, or large village in fact, or wherever numbers of her fellow-creatures were congregated, would be very oppressive if she were forced to sit idle. Probably she would have felt it more if her thoughts had been disengaged; but even Jane Sinclair, sincere and practical though she undoubtedly was, now and then grew dreamy when she dwelt upon the bright future of a married life.

She had paid her visits, and was just leaving the last cottage beyond the almshouses, when a wide heavy cart drove down the lane, and prevented her from crossing the road as she had intended. She stood for a moment at the cottage door, where two little boys about four and five years of age were playing. They had no occasion to run, but of course they did, just as the cart drew near, and immediately in front of the horse. Of course also Jane's impulse was to bring them back, but she only succeeded in saving one, the other in his haste fell, and though unhurt by the wheel, his arm was severely injured.

The screaming, calling, talking, rushing backwards and forwards

which ensued, were both confusing and alarming to poor Jane. The neighbours crowded round the child, and seemed inclined to appeal to her as, in some way or other, the cause of the accident. She had rushed after the child, therefore it was supposed she had made him fall, and Jane found herself considered responsible not only for the injury, but for its treatment. "What was to be done? What would the young lady wish to be done? The child was an orphan, he lived with his aunt Stokes, poor body! she was very weakly, and would never know what to do with him." The voices were so eager that Jane could only indistinctly gather their meaning. She stood in the centre of the crowd, self-possessed in manner but exceedingly pale, trying to make herself heard as she suggested the natural step of taking the child to the nearest surgeon that his arm might be examined. A sturdy labourer took the little fellow up, and the crowd moved on; for numbers had been attracted to the spot, and no one chose to go away till every thing was known that could be known.

"Mr. Fowler's is the nearest, carry him in there," said an elderly woman as they turned the corner into High Street. "Yes, pray take him to the first surgeon you can," said Jane eagerly. She was becoming very uneasy, for the child moaned sadly. "Keep off, will you?" said the labourer, as he mounted the steps to the green door. A few idle boys still peeped in, and Jane was kept back. A window which opened upon a balcony above was thrown open, and some one looked out. "I declare it's Miss Sinclair," said a loud, quick voice, and then a lady wearing a black cap with rose-coloured ribbons called out, "Get back, boys, get back; why don't you let the lady come up?" The boys laughed, and scrambled to the side railings, and one of them in his haste nearly fell upon Jane. She felt so annoyed that her impulse was to go away and leave the child now that he was in safe hands; but whilst she was hesitating, a young girl appeared at the open door, and speaking in a decided tone, informed the unruly little crowd that she would send for the policeman if they did not instantly move; and then making way for Jane, asked if she would not like to come in. "Thank you; just for one moment, if I am not intruding;" and Jane hurried up the steps, not knowing whom she was addressing till she entered the passage. Then as she looked up, a gleam of satisfaction brightened her countenance, and she exclaimed, "Katharine! Katharine Ashton!—indeed I did not know you."—"But I had not forgotten Miss Sinclair," replied Katharine. An eager smile of pleasure for a moment crossed her face, but her manner became more hesitating, and she added, "Will you walk

up stairs and wait in the drawing-room? Mr. Fowler is out, but his assistant is examining the child." Jane paused a little awkwardly. "Mrs. Fowler and Selina—Miss Fowler—are there, are they not?" "Yes; they would be very glad to see you if you would like to wait and hear what is the matter with the little boy." Jane looked round as if she would willingly have escaped from the necessity. "Or the back parlour is empty, if you would rather stay there," said Katharine, opening a door near her. Jane had recovered from her uncomfortable shyness now, and said she would go up stairs; only first—they had not met for so many years—she should like to know how Katharine's family were—her father and her mother, and her brother. She remembered how Katharine used to talk of him. The question was of course reciprocated, and a little family history was given on both sides, and inquiries were made about Miss Richardson, who had given up her school and removed from Rilworth, and Katharine was telling all she could remember, when Mrs. Fowler interrupted them, rushing down the stairs in a silk dress, flounced to such a width that it almost filled the space between the walls and the balustrade. Katharine drew back, and Jane was greeted with a thousand apologies that she had been allowed to remain below. Mrs. Fowler was so anxious seeing her amongst all those rude boys, and Selina was quite frightened! Jane only laughed, and said there was nothing to be alarmed at; but she walked up stairs and Katharine followed.

"Dear Miss Sinclair,"—Selina did not call her "Dear Jane," because Katharine was present—it was delightful to see her—it was such a long time since they had met, and there were such interesting things to tell and to hear! The delight was so noisy Jane felt almost stunned by it; and the interesting things were tumbled out from the heterogeneous stores of Miss Fowler's memory with such rapidity and in such wonderful disorder that Jane's consciousness of her own identity was rather shaken by it. She listened to the tall, gaily-dressed, handsome girl who sat by her side, overwhelming her with civilities till she began to ask herself whether it was not really true that they had been great friends, and whether she had not herself suddenly become very cold-hearted since she could not reciprocate the gratification. Besides, both Mrs. Fowler and Selina took such an interest in her affairs, they evidently knew all about her. They did not, indeed, actually mention Colonel Forbes' name, but they talked about happy events, and hoped they might be allowed to congratulate,

till poor Jane felt the crimson colour mounting to her cheeks, and tears of shyness and annoyance actually gathering in her eyes.

"Would you be kind enough to ask what the report of the little boy is?" asked Jane, at length, turning to Katharine Ashton, who was standing unnoticed by the fire-place. "Ring, Selina, ring," said Mrs. Fowler; "I can't think what has become of Betsey. We have a new housemaid, Miss Sinclair, and it is difficult to get her into the ways of the family. Servants are great troubles, as you young ladies will all find when you have homes of your own. I can't do any thing, can I, Miss Sinclair, in the way of getting you a servant? Mrs. Dore, at the Register Office, mentioned a good steady girl to me last week." Jane tried to smile and look amiable, but declined the offer of Mrs. Fowler's assistance, as she was not likely to require a servant just yet. "Ah! delay! well! you young ladies are particular—that every one knows. Selly often tells me that she never shall make up her mind to be married; but she does not know, does she? till the time comes."—"Would you like me to go and ask for the child myself?" inquired Katharine, breaking into the midst of Mrs. Fowler's speech.—"Ah! yes; perhaps it would be as well: Miss Sinclair will be very much obliged to you, I am sure. Go down to the dispensary, my dear, and knock at the door and ask;—you know where it is, on the right-hand side, at the bottom of the stairs." Katharine was gone before Jane had time to apologise for the trouble she was giving, and Mrs. Fowler went on; "That is Kate Ashton, Miss Sinclair; you must remember Kate Ashton, at Miss Richardson's. You, and Kate, and my Selly, were all at school together. She is a very good girl, is Kate; not, you know, quite the lady—that one couldn't expect—but very useful; a great help at home, I believe. She often comes to see us: Selly likes the keeping up old friendships, and Kate really is a very good girl."—"And old Mr. Ashton is considered very rich," observed Selina; "they say he won't keep on business much longer."—"He has a son to take it, has he not?" asked Jane, feeling quite glad to touch upon a subject which did not involve personalities. "Why, yes, yes," observed Mrs. Fowler, with some hesitation, whilst Selina smiled, and bridled her head, and said, "Oh, mamma!" and then stopped, and smiled and bridled again. "I am right, Selly," observed Mrs. Fowler, nodding at her: "old Mr. Ashton has got a son to take the business; but we may tell Miss Sinclair, between ourselves, that there is a great doubt whether he ever will take it. You see it's a great pity to throw a fine young man away in that fashion—

to put him behind a counter, and make nothing of him."—"The business has been so long established," observed Jane; "and Mr. Ashton is so much respected, it would have seemed the most natural thing to do; however, that is really not any concern of mine, only I hope, for Katharine's sake, that whatever her brother undertakes he may succeed in."

"Oh! there is no doubt of that, no doubt whatever," began Mrs. Fowler; "he is a very fine——;" the eulogium was stopped by Katharine's re-entrance. "Poor child, how is he?" asked Selina, before Jane had time to speak.—"In a good deal of pain from the bruises; but there is no bone broken," replied Katharine, rather shortly. "They are going to take him home," she added; "but I said I thought Miss Sinclair would like to see him first."—"Thank you; certainly," said Jane; "may I go down stairs?" and she rose eagerly.—"We are so pleased; it has been such a great delight to Selly seeing you again," observed Mrs. Fowler, seizing Jane's hand, and retaining it against her will.—"A great delight, indeed," echoed Selina; "we shall meet, I hope, very often now."—"As often as circumstances will permit," said Mrs. Fowler, with a peculiar intonation of the voice, which was meant as a kind of stage aside; "you forget that, Selly." Poor Jane blushed again, and felt fearfully stiff and cold. "Good morning," was all she could say; and she followed Katharine down stairs.

They went into the surgery; the little boy was lying in the assistant's arms; he was quiet, but very pale. A woman who lived in the same house with his aunt, was going to take him home, but she had gone away on an errand. The assistant was a little impatient of his burden; he had a good many patients to attend to, and there was nothing in the case of a child's bruised arm to excite much sympathy even if he had much to give. Jane asked a few questions about the treatment required, and then observing the hasty glances which the young surgeon cast at the door, offered to sit down, and take the child in her lap, and keep him still. "He is so dirty," said Katharine; "you can't do that."—Jane did shrink back for a moment as she looked at his soiled face and torn clothes, and then she smiled, and putting her arm round him, said, "I am afraid it will be a long time before we help others, if we wait till the world is clean." An accent in her voice, or possibly an expression in her face, carried Katharine's memory far back—to Miss Richardson's—the scene in the passage, the ringing of the bell, and the calling over the names. It had a strange effect upon her;—it seemed to break down a barrier

between herself and Jane; yet she stood silent and distant as before. "I suppose one ought to feel more pity than disgust with these poor little creatures," said Jane, as she allowed the child's head to rest upon her arm, though not till she had covered it with a handkerchief. "Their mothers ought to be taught to keep them clean," replied Katharine; "the dirty children in Rilworth are a disgrace to the town."—"In spite of the schools," said Jane thoughtfully. "Do you know Mr. Reeves?" she added.—"He calls sometimes to talk to my father," replied Katharine.—"He is a very good man," said Jane; "the poor people seem to like him very much."—"Do they? I never heard any one say much about him; but my father likes him in the church."—"And don't you like him too?" asked Jane.—"Oh! yes, very much, when I hear him, but he generally preaches in the evening, and then I stay at home and read to my mother: she is afraid of taking cold if she goes out at night—to church at least,—it is so hot."—"Poor little fellow," said Jane, again turning her attention to the child, "he is an orphan."—"He lives in one of the almshouses in Long Lane, doesn't he?" asked Katharine; "I fancied I heard one of the men who brought him say so."—"Yes, with his aunt; I ought to know something about him, for he belongs to my district; but he has been in the country lately." Katharine looked at him with more interest, and said, she did not know that Miss Sinclair had any particular reason for taking care of him. "Was her district a very large one?"—"No, indeed, very small," exclaimed Jane, laughing, "scarcely to be called one, indeed, when compared with others. There are three unoccupied now, Mr. Reeves says, and in the very worst parts of the town. I don't know who could take them;—there does not seem any one in Rilworth willing to come forward."—"People should be more like you," said Katharine, quickly; "but I suppose, generally speaking, every one has his own business to attend to."—Jane became rather thoughtful, and presently said, in a hesitating voice: "Mr. Reeves thinks that the business of the poor is every one's business."—"Oh! yes, of course, if they have nothing else to attend to," said Katharine. "It is a pity there are not more ladies living in Rilworth."—"And it is such a wretched place!" continued Jane: "I heard miserable stories about it the other day at the district meeting. One family I know myself in Long Lane, seven children there are, the husband works at the cotton-mill, and gets nine shillings a week, when he is in full work, but half the time he is only employed for three days out of the six, and then he gets nothing; so how they all

live is more than I can imagine ; and there is an old debt hanging over them for house rent, to be paid by degrees, and the poor woman told me to-day that she lay awake at night, thinking what she should do, because all her little furniture would be seized if the money she had agreed for was not ready. And another woman I know, with five children, and the husband quite out of regular work, only gaining half-a-crown or a shilling occasionally, and the woman looking so ill—actually starved, and telling me one Saturday evening, when I happened to go there, that she could not send her children to school any more, for she had parted with their only decent clothes to get them a bit of bread. And this sort of thing one feels is going on all over the town, and no one seems able to get at it, or really help it.” —“ But I thought the District Society did a great deal to help them,” said Katharine. A sad smile passed over Jane’s face. “ If you did but know,” she said, “ what it is to dole out district tickets to poor starving people. Sixpence each is their worth ; and we are obliged to be very economical over them. Districts of forty families are not provided with more than twelve in a month. I don’t mean that one is not glad to give these, or that the poor people are not grateful for them ; but it is startling when one looks through the list of subscriptions to see persons contenting themselves with giving half-a-crown and five shillings a year, and then to hear, as I heard it said the other day, that there ought to be no poverty in Rilworth, because the District Society provides for the wants of the poor.”

“ You seem to care a great deal about it,” said Katharine : she blushed as she spoke, for her tone had been very abrupt, and she was conscious of it. Jane’s dreamy eyes were fixed upon her for a moment in wonder, —“ Can one live amongst them without caring ?” she said.

There was no answer, and there was no time for one. The woman who was to take charge of the child came in to fetch him, and he was given into her charge, and Jane went with her. She would not leave the child, she said, till she had seen what he would want at home.

They shook hands at parting, and Jane hoped often to see Katharine again ; but her manner was a little awkward, as if she did not know on what footing to place their acquaintance. Katharine smiled, —“ If you will come and see me in our parlour behind the shop,” she said, “ I should think it very kind ; I am there nearly all day ; my father will not let me go into the shop.” Jane held out her hand again—this time with great cordiality, —“ Thank you ; then if I may come, I will,” and she followed the woman and the little boy down the street.

Katharine stood at the door looking after her ; then she heard Selina Fowler's voice, and, without waiting to be spoken to, she hurried home.

CHAPTER V.

KATHARINE ASHTON's character was one which unfolded itself slowly : the bud was only half opened even at eighteen, but within it was the form of the perfect flower ! so it is with all whose dispositions, like hers, are grafted upon candour and honesty of purpose. There is a great deal of talking in the present day about truth, and "shams," and "humbugs," but through it all one cannot help feeling that as much falsity often exists in the minds of those who declaim most loudly upon the subject, as in the very persons with whom they are finding fault. Theories of truth are for the most part untrue. It is practical truth which we want,—conscientiousness,—the agreement of the daily life with the principles upon which it is professed to be governed. Let these be what they may,—high or low, religious, or merely moral, founded upon right or upon mistaken judgment,—if the constant effort of the heart is to keep the principle and the action in accordance, there is a hope,—more than a hope—almost a certainty, of improvement, for the foundation of the character is true. And so, on the contrary, if we allow ourselves, in ever so slight a degree, to hold principles which we do not heartily try, in spite of constant failure, to carry out in practice, the germ of improvement is wanting, for the foundation of the character is untrue.

Katharine Ashton's tone of mind was not in the least like Jane Sinclair's. Jane was deeply, earnestly religious, both in feeling and conduct ! Katharine was religious also, but the motive was duty, not love. Jane was dreamy and imaginative, and but for her exceeding unselfishness, and kindness of heart, it would at times have seemed a task beyond her strength to be practical. Katharine, on the contrary, was essentially active in body and mind ; so active that energy became her snare, for constant occupation kept down her higher impulses. Yet one thing they had in common,—sincerity ; and when they met, with the barriers of society and education between them, they understood each other and were at ease.

Katharine, perhaps, the most so. She had no wish for any

thing beyond her own position ; no object in striving to be what she was not. Simple herself, she gave others credit for equal simplicity ; and when Jane met her cordially, and recalled the pleasant feelings of old times, she received the kindness as it was intended, not as in any way a condescension, but as the warmth of heart of an old friend.

Yet there was an influence in Jane's character to which it was scarcely possible that Katharine should be insensible. She was very ignorant of herself,—of her own powers,—or even her own tastes ; but there were some moments in which glimpses of higher enjoyments than she had yet known, and impulses for nobler good, shot, as it were, across the twilight of her mind. She could feel what she did not reason upon ; she had felt the charm of Jane Sinclair's quiet but chivalrous spirit of self-sacrifice when they were children together at school. It had insensibly aided to keep up the standard of her own principles, as its memory lingered with her in after years ; and now it had met her again in the same form,—unpretending, unexciting, almost concealed by an impassive manner, yet as intensely earnest, as thoroughly single-minded, as in the young days when Jane lost the chance of her own reward, because she could not make up her mind to give up the hope of helping another.

"How can one live amongst them without caring?" repeated Katharine to herself, as she walked leisurely home. She had a new idea in her mind, and she looked down the narrow alleys and courts, which opened into the High Street of Rilworth, with something of the feeling of having seen them for the first time. Yet it did not quite strike her that she could have any concern with them : she did not know that she had time, or talents, or money to spare, as she supposed Jane had. She felt, indeed, that Jane was using her powers to the best advantage, and she honoured her for it. If she herself was a lady, with plenty of money, and nothing to occupy her, it seemed that she would like to do the same ; but now with the business of the shop, and her duties to her parents, and work for her brother, there could be no time, she fancied, for any thing more.

Yet Katharine was not happy when she reached home ; the old sense of nothingness and uselessness was upon her. She went up to her room to take off her bonnet, and was sent for to write a letter—an order, for her father, to go off by that day's post. There was a great disinclination in her mind for such work. She did not see why people should send orders, or what good her father did, except to himself, by undertaking to execute them. People

read, she supposed, for amusement, and what was amusement? Jane Sinclair's work was much more profitable. She wished she could have something like it, instead of her own; but that was discontent, and Katharine had a great dread of growing discontented, for she thought that she saw in her own mind a tendency to it; and she knelt down and repeated a prayer against the fault, out of a little book of prayers which Miss Richardson had given her. Katharine's sincerity made her do that. A childlike conscientiousness took the place of love in her religion. She did what love and faith would do; but, as yet, she only found safety in it, not pleasure.

Writing the letter occupied her till nearly four o'clock,—and then there was just time to read to her mother till it grew dark; so she brought one of the novels from the library, and read aloud till the twilight; and then the fire was stirred, and a bright blaze made, and chairs were drawn near to the cheerful hearth; and Mr. Ashton came in from the shop to have a little talk before tea.

"Well, Kitty," was his first question, "where did you go this afternoon when I saw you setting forth so boldly up the street by yourself?"—"Selly Fowler asked me to walk up and see her," replied Katharine; "she wanted some help about a new dress she is going to wear to-night, and the maid was busy."—"Miss Selly likes to see her handsome face set off by fine clothes—doesn't she now?" said Mr. Ashton, laughing. "But what is the party to-night?"—"A tea-party at Mr. Madden's the brewer," said Katharine, "and a dance, too, Selly thinks. She wanted me to wish to go too, father," added Katharine, with a smile, "but I did not wish it at all; I should never care to know set-up people like the Miss Maddens."—"They are very stylish, though," said Mrs. Ashton, "and the Andrews's are there for ever."—"That is partly why I don't like them, mother dear," said Katharine; "I never like any one that Matty Andrews likes. But, father, I saw Miss Sinclair to-day, too, at Mr. Fowler's, and she asked after you all, and after John, and seemed to remember all about us."—"Calling at Mrs. Fowler's, was she?" said Mrs. Ashton; "I never should have thought they visited; old Miss Maurice used to keep so much to herself when she was living here."—"She was not calling, though Mrs. Fowler took it as a call," said Katharine, laughing; "she came there by accident, because there was a child hurt, and she had seen it fall, and came to know what the hurt was. She has one of the districts, and goes about a good deal, I suspect."—"Ladies like to fidget in and out with the poor people," said Mr. Ashton, "but I don't see, for my part, the good of it. What is

the use of a clergyman if he doesn't look after his own poor? however, they have nothing else to do in the world—I suppose that's it.”—“Miss Sinclair thinks the Rilworth people very badly off,” said Katharine.—“I tell you what, Kitty,” replied Mr. Ashton, somewhat hastily, “that is just one of the things which young ladies like to talk about, because they don't understand it. There's a set of idle vagabonds in Rilworth who will drink, and won't work, and they may be poor, I grant; but who can help a man who won't help himself?”—“But if the man drinks the woman suffers,” said Mrs. Ashton, who had a natural sympathy for wives. “Very likely; but let the worst come to the worst, there's the Union, with plenty to eat and drink, and good teaching for the children,—there isn't a better school in Rilworth than the Union School.”—“The poor are very foolish, I must say that,” observed Mrs. Ashton. “I was talking to Anne Crossin, the new washer-woman, the other day, and asking her why she and her blind husband did not go into the Union; and she said that if he went they must all go, and then she shouldn't be with him, or with the children. But, as I said to her, it's better not to see them, and to know they are well off, than to be with them and see them starve. She couldn't take in the notion, though, and said she would rather work on as she was, and trust in Providence.”—“But, father,” asked Kate, “wouldn't a man like that get some thing from the parish?”—“That depends,” replied Mr. Ashton, oracularly,—“you see, Kitty, the guardians of the poor have two things to attend to—the public and the pauper;—if they help the pauper beyond a certain point, they come heavy upon the public, and then there's an outcry. Poor-rates in Rilworth, as it is, are monstrously heavy.”—“John Crossin keeps a lodging-house,” said Mrs. Ashton,—“that's the reason why they don't get any help from the parish.”—“To be sure not!” exclaimed Mr. Ashton: “a man pays his fifteen pounds a-year, and rates and taxes, and yet he wants to be considered a pauper: it's an absurdity.”—“It does seem fair enough,” observed Mrs. Ashton; “and Anne Crossin didn't exactly complain,—only, she said that it would be no good to her to get into a smaller house, because, if she did, she should have rent to pay, and now the lodgers did help her with that, and sometimes there was a trifle over.”—“Then, they only want a little help till the man can have his eyes couched, and get back to his work again,” said Katharine—“it does seem rather a hard case.”—“My dear Kitty,”—and Mr. Ashton became a little excited in manner, as he always did when there was a question about the Union—“it's mere nonsense for a girl like you to give

any opinion about such matters. Guardians of the poor are bound to protect the public; they can't allow imposition; they don't want people to starve, and so they say come into the Union; and if the poor don't choose to come into the Union, they must take the consequences."—"Then, what Miss Sinclair says is quite true," said Katharine, "and it is a great pity that more help is not given to the District Society; for you see, father,"—and a smile played upon her lips—"district societies are not bound to protect the public."—"I don't know any thing about district societies, and don't care what they do," replied Mr. Ashton, "but I never will stand by silent and hear the guardians of the poor abused. There they are, working week after week like dray-horses to keep down the rates; and every idle vagabond in the country who doesn't choose to lift his hand to his mouth is to be put upon them for support: it really is too bad."—"And things were so badly managed in the old poor-law time, when every one was helped," said Mrs. Ashton: "the sums of money that were spent!—no one ever would have imagined it; I used to hear my father talking about it."—"Sums of money spent, and no good done!" replied Mr. Ashton: "now we have matters regularly ordered, and economically too."

Katharine was not accustomed to argue with her father: and, in the present case, she would not have known what she was to argue for; but she did not feel that the root of the matter had been reached. Possibly guardians of the poor were bound to be strict; but if they could not give help, who could?

The report of the District Visiting Society happened to be lying on the table, and she had an impulse to examine the subscription list. Mr. Ashton's name was down for five shillings per annum: the whole amount of the subscriptions was eighty pounds. Katharine was rather fond of reckoning, so she amused herself with making a calculation. The population of Rilworth was about 5,000—that she knew. Suppose 500 only required relief, the eighty pounds would be a little more than three shillings and threepence each.

"Poor Anne Crossin—with her blind husband and her seven children!—no wonder that her heart sank when she had no resource even in the guardians of the poor, and her share in the public charities of the town was but three shillings and threepence in the course of the year."

Katharine went to bed that night thinking of the poor. She could scarcely be said ever really to have thought of them before;—and she did more than think—she prayed for them; she asked

for special help for special cases—the poor washerwoman—the woman who lay awake at night thinking how she should pay her rent—the mother who sold her children's frocks to buy them bread. When she rose up from prayer she went to her desk, and took out half-a-sovereign which she had laid by for the purchase of a new work-box, and put it in her purse, that it might be offered on the next opportunity to Miss Sinclair, for her district.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a bright afternoon for Jane's walk to Maplestead, or rather on the Maplestead road; very warm for the end of September, and yet very invigorating; and there were glorious colours on the fading leaves, and dancing lights amongst the heavy boughs of the old beeches and oaks, and sunshine on the broad green border of grass by the road side, and misty purple vapour over the peeps of the distant country. In days of yore there had been a forest where Maplestead stood, and the peculiarities of forest scenery were still to be traced along the road,—glades, and underwood, and spaces where trees had once stood, now turned into open commons, and rich in heath, and fern, and gorse. Jane would not have been human if a glad feeling of future possession had not enhanced the enjoyment of that walk. All the property on both sides of the road between Maplestead and Rilworth for many miles belonged to Colonel Forbes by recent purchase. The estate was one of the finest in the county, and she was to share it. It was a very strange fact,—she could scarcely believe it to be true; she so young, so ignorant of the ways of the world, so little fitted, as it seemed, for a position of influence. Almost she could have thought herself wrong in undertaking it, but there was another fact more strange—that she should be loved; that a man like Colonel Forbes, accustomed to the most intellectual society, fastidious, clever, universally respected, should care for her—more than care for her—that he should have felt the happiness of life at stake, when he asked if his affection could be returned. That would have been a problem never to be solved, but that Jane loved herself, and from the depth of her own feeling could gain faith to believe in his.

A shadow fell upon the road: it was very distant, but Jane's eye caught it in a moment. She stepped forward hastily, but

checked the impulse almost immediately, and only drew the closer to her mother's side and became silent.

"There are two," she said, as the forms of the persons approaching became more distinct. Her tone of disappointment met with instant sympathy. "Some one he has met on the road, I dare say," said Mrs. Sinclair; "they will be sure to part again." Jane did not reply, she walked more slowly now, as if she dreaded the meeting. "It is not a very prepossessing looking person," said Mrs. Sinclair, smiling; "I do not think Colonel Forbes will long have him for a companion."

Jane watched them anxiously. She did not like the meeting to be in the presence of a stranger, and she could willingly have turned aside to avoid it altogether; but they were too near for that. Colonel Forbes stopped when he came up to them, as if he meant to wish his companion "good-bye," but the hint was not taken. "It is young Ashton, Mr. Ashton the bookseller's son," said Mrs. Sinclair; "there is nothing very awful in him, Jane, so you need not look so alarmed." Jane was not alarmed at the sight of John Ashton, she only thought of him as a restraint, but she did shrink from something, she could not tell what, and her limbs trembled, and her heart beat very fast; and then in her extreme effort to be self-possessed, she went up to Colonel Forbes and placed the coldest, most lifeless of hands in his, and accosted him with a remark upon the weather, which might quite as easily have been addressed to John Ashton.

The polished gentleman to whom the words were spoken betrayed no signs of the impression which the greeting gave him. He bowed John Ashton away with an air which did not admit of another word being said, offered an arm to Jane and to her mother, and turned with them towards Maplestead.

"The young man wants one of my farms," he said, addressing Mrs. Sinclair. The information was not very interesting, and no one probably but Jane would have noticed the tone in which it was made. It struck her, however, as chilling, and there was a quick glance at Colonel Forbes' countenance, followed by a slight shadow upon her own. Mrs. Sinclair paused; perhaps she thought that Jane would speak; but finding her silent, she asked a few questions about the farm and the young man's prospects. Colonel Forbes went on drily — he could be very dry, peculiarly uninteresting, when he chose, only one felt that underneath there might be a volcano working, and so there was the excitement of guessing when it might burst. "Young Ashton," he repeated, "wants one of my farms; I don't know whether I

shall let him have it. I don't fancy speculations on my estate. The young man seems clever enough, but he is theoretical, and likely to try experiments."—"He is Katharine Ashton's brother, mamma," said Jane timidly.—"You know him, then, do you?" asked Colonel Forbes a little stiffly.—"Oh, yes; that is, I don't know him, but I know his sister. We were at school together in those odd days when I went to Miss Richardson's." Jane's words were quite free; but her manner was very hesitating. "Then probably you have a wish in the case," said Colonel Forbes. Jane's impulse was to say, yes, and to beg that John Ashton might have whatever he wanted, but her unfortunate shyness stood in the way, and in the same quiet tone she replied that she did not particularly care about it. A quick ear might have caught the sound of a gentle sigh which escaped from Mrs. Sinclair as Colonel Forbes became suddenly silent, and a few minutes afterwards she withdrew her arm from his, and said that she thought it might be better for her not to go any farther, and she would turn back. Colonel Forbes was very polite—very properly desirous that she should not walk by herself, but it was all a matter of form, and Mrs. Sinclair resolutely retraced her steps towards Rilworth, and Jane and Colonel Forbes walked on alone.

Neither of them spoke. Colonel Forbes moved his walking stick backwards and forwards; Jane went steadily on, looking neither to the right nor the left. They were very near the first lodge at Maplestead; their usual walk was the beech tree avenue, which led from it in a side direction to the house. Colonel Forbes opened the gate, but Jane stopped before entering. Three persons were coming down the hill, and one was Katharine Ashton; the others Jane did not quite know, but she thought that the showy bonnet must be Selina Fowler's. They were so near that she could not avoid them without positive rudeness. Colonel Forbes looked like a thunder-cloud; he held the gate open impatiently. Selina was pressing forward to speak, but her arm was within Katharine's, and Jane saw that she was forcibly kept back, and they passed with only a bow. Jane turned to Colonel Forbes, and said, with a smile of relief, "For the sake of Katharine Ashton, you must give the farm to her brother; you would have had Miss Selina Fowler forcing her acquaintance upon you but for that little bit of tact."—"And why not for your own sake, Jane?" exclaimed Colonel Forbes impetuously. The volcano was about to burst, but Jane did not tremble now; any thing was better than that miserable stiffness caused by her own fault of manner. "Are you never to have courage to ask

me for any thing you wish?" he continued, — "must we always meet as strangers? or am I to believe that there is something so unfortunate in myself as to inspire fear when I most earnestly long for confidence?" — "I will try," said poor Jane, and tears gathered in her eyes. "I should have been better if we had been alone, but I thought you would not like it." — "Like what?" he repeated quickly; "not that a word or a look should pass which a stranger might comment upon. You know well enough, Jane, that I should shrink from that as much as yourself; but are there not a thousand ways of showing that we understand each other? A smile, or an accent, the pressure of the hand even? And am I never to see any thing but that look of a frightened fawn, or feel any thing but those icy graspless fingers?" — "Wait and see," said Jane. She looked up into his face with an expression of such confiding love, that the most distrustful spirit even that of Colonel Forbes, could not but have been touched by it. He was a very impatient man, very exacting: a man who is impatient and exacting must, in spite of his better principles, too often be selfish and unjust, yet he was honourable, and in a degree soft-hearted. One such look as that and he was won back, at least for the present, and he put his arm round Jane and kissed her, and the cloud passed away.

They talked of John Ashton, and the farm, and of Katharine, and Jane's acquaintance with her. It was all interesting to Colonel Forbes then; he liked to read Jane's character in what she said, and delighted in watching the unconscious betrayal of her thoughts, and seeing how, in every thing, she had a reference to him. She praised Katharine Ashton, and described her simplicity of manner, her quiet dress, her considerate thoughtfulness, and, at last, encouraged by the attention she received, and thinking more and more of Katharine, and less and less of herself, grew quite excited and eloquent. By the time they returned to Rillworth, they had discoursed upon many subjects, and were both charmed with their walk—charmed with each other. Jane thought they were also both charmed with Katharine Ashton; but she was mistaken; Colonel Forbes had nearly forgotten her existence.

There was a note lying on Jane's table when she reached home. It was from Katharine, enclosing the half sovereign for the District Society. "Miss Ashton had called to see Miss Sinclair," the servant said, "and had waited some time, and then she had left the note." "So nice and good of Katharine Ashton—so practically good, is it not?" exclaimed Jane, putting the note

into Colonel Forbes' hand. It was examined and commented upon. The handwriting was clear and legible, just like Katharine herself, Jane said: the few sentences were well expressed, from being entirely to the point. Colonel Forbes was attracted by it. He was a thoughtful man in his way, and very full of theories. He had theories especially about society. Proud though he was—as proud perhaps or prouder than any other man in the county—he yet professed upon some subjects an ultra liberality. Every one beneath him was to be raised, but to that precise height which would still admit of his standing superior. It was pleasant to hear him put forth his views upon these points; his words flowed so smoothly; one felt when listening to him that the golden days of fraternity and equality might, after all, not be so complete a myth as the startling facts of the world would at first lead one to expect.

He was a great educationist too, a staunch upholder of national, model, and industrial schools; his speeches in their favour at public meetings were proverbially good, and his influence in private was always exerted for their support. Yet, strange to say, Colonel Forbes was not a popular man. He had many political friends amongst the tradespeople of Rilworth, and it was said that if he came forward, he would certainly be returned for the borough, but there was no enthusiasm for him. He bestowed favour, but not sympathy, and he gained that which favours can buy,—respect and attention,—but affection demanded a price which it was not in his nature to give. His way of looking at Katharine Ashton's note was a singular exemplification of this trait. It was to him a specimen of the mind of a class, not of an individual. He perceived in it not what Katharine Ashton saw, or thought, or felt, but what the daughter of a person in Mr. Ashton's position might, under favourable circumstances, and with the increased advantages of the nineteenth century, become. "Yes, it is a clever, well expressed note," he said, as he returned the paper to Jane; "it shows what might be done—what is doing, in fact—all through the country. Fifty years ago no one who had not been highly educated would have been able to write in that way."—"Katharine Ashton is clever," said Jane, "yet I don't believe she is in any way remarkable; but what I like is the thoughtfulness and the decision. I quite well remember its striking me, when we were children together at school, that when a thing was to be done, Katharine was always the person to begin."—"I dare say she is a very good girl," replied Colonel Forbes, carelessly. "One can't be surprised at the way education

creeps on," he added. "Such a man as Ashton has enormous influence in a town like Rilworth, and you may be quite sure he is shrewd enough to see that to have his children sensible and well informed, is to increase his own power."—"I suppose all that kind of calculation does go on," observed Jane, "and I have no reason for supposing Mr. Ashton to be different from his neighbours, but I think one would be glad to see persons educating their children from some better motive than that of increasing their own power."—"You must take things as they are, my dear Jane," was the reply; "it does not do to be Utopian. You can't expect people to put aside as a motive, the tangible good which is set before their eyes every day, and act from some abstract theory which they have not time to think about."—"But," said Jane, and her voice was a little hesitating, from the instinctive dread that they were about to differ,—"I should think that is what we must all learn to do more or less. Justice, and temperance, and truth are excellent virtues in a worldly point of view, but if we practise them only from worldly motives their value is diminished, if not actually lost."—"Young, dear child, young," said the Colonel, and he looked complacently upon the soft, blue eyes which were so timidly lifted up to his; "but we won't discuss the point now,—I must be going; only just sit down and play to me for a quarter of an hour, and tell me to-morrow if I can do any thing to please this good friend of yours, Katharine Ashton."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day was Saturday, a busy day at Mr. Ashton's. A great deal of business went on on Saturdays, so many people came in from the country; the shop was always full from about one o'clock till five, not perhaps with purchasers, but loungers, who yet very often became purchasers in the end. Selina Fowler always made a point of going to see Katharine on a Saturday. She was sure to hear news in some shape or other, for though Katharine was not curious, she could not avoid knowing a little of what was going on in the shop, especially as Mr. Ashton himself would occasionally stray into the parlour, and narrate, with considerable humour, the sayings and doings of the unthinking customers, who supposed he had neither eye, nor ear, nor thought for any thing but the sale of his books.

"Now do tell me, Kate," said Selina, as she reposed in a lounging attitude on the seat of a window which looked out into the back court and the little garden, "do tell me when Jane Sinclair and Colonel Forbes are going to be married." — "I don't know Miss Sinclair well enough to ask her," replied Katharine, who was diligently stitching a wristband; "perhaps Selly," and she looked up archly, "you had better inquire, as you seem to think she is wishing to make your acquaintance." — "Oh! as to that," replied Selina, tossing back her bonnet, and shaking the profusion of long black ringlets which half covered her face, "we are acquainted you know. Mamma was saying yesterday, that really she felt it quite rude not to have called; but we shall meet next week at the ball, I dare say, and then we can make apologies." — "Are you going to the ball?" asked Katharine, and a smile, which, however, was not perceived, played upon her lips. "Why, of course I am; every one is going." — "And you think Miss Sinclair will be there?" inquired Katharine. "Jane Sinclair! certainly. Colonel Forbes is one of the stewards. And you will be there too, Kate. I tell you every one is going." — "They call it a Union Ball, don't they?" asked Katharine. "A Union Ball in honour of royalty, as I heard George Andrews say this very day," replied Selina. "George is full of it; they have made him a steward, and he and I are to dance the first country dance together." — "What is the price of the tickets?" asked Katharine. — "Five shillings; they would not have it higher, George told me, because of making it more than people could afford; and they would not have it less, because it might admit people one shouldn't like to be there. Not but there will be an odd set, as it is, George says. The Dobsons, of the china shop, I hear, mean to go, but I don't believe they know how to dance a bit." — "A reason why I should not go," said Katharine. "I have quite forgotten how to dance, and I never had but three quarters at Miss Richardson's." — "Oh! but you are different," said Selina; "it will be quite remarkable if you don't go. They were all but putting your father on the committee, I heard to-day. You know it won't be at all a poor thing; if it was, papa and mamma wouldn't hear of my being there; but it really is for every body. I believe the Duchess of Lowther herself is to be there." — "Indeed," said Katharine, and her fingers worked faster than ever; "do you know, Selly, it strikes me sometimes that the world is going out of its mind?" She said it so gravely that Selina could not detect the lurking satire, and could only answer with a pettish laugh, "La! Kate, you are so foolish, there is no talking to you," and

then put on her bonnet to go. Katharine, however, was bent upon hearing a few more particulars, and Selina, quickly mollified when gaiety was in question, sat down again, and began a detailed, if not a very eloquent description of the whys and the wherefores of the Union Ball, all of which she professed to have gathered from George Andrews, the eldest son of the great auctioneer, and a friend of her brother's; the said George Andrews having been duly informed of the facts by Colonel Forbes, who was uncle, or grandson, or hundredth cousin to the Duchess of Lowther. The Duke of Lowther, the great man of the county, had, it seems lately been flattered by the admission of his eldest son into Parliament without opposition, and his friends were therefore anxious that he should give some demonstration of his popular sympathies, and considered no occasion more fitting than that of a Royal birthday. The Duke had been accustomed on this day to give a dinner to the poor, and a feast to the school children, and generally entertained his own particular friends at his own castle, and these festivities no doubt he would have been willing to pursue; but, under the circumstances, some more special condescension seemed desirable. The Duke was an amiable man, an excellent landlord, a kind friend to all classes; he had a great wish to promote good feelings amongst his neighbours of every degree, but he did not exactly know how to set about it. At last some one suggested a ball, a Union Ball, which might be loyal and patriotic, and gracefully condescending on the part of the Duke and Duchess, if they would patronise it, and thankfully respectful and cordial on the part of the neighbourhood, if they would make up their minds to go to it. Balls of this kind were not unknown in Rillworth. They had been heard of in former days in connection with charity. Why, it was said, should not the amusement be equally suitable in the present instance? It might be open to all persons, and it would do good to trade, encourage kindly feeling, and be, in fact, the beginning of that unity of feeling, which is a grand aim of all persons who wish to better the condition of their fellow-creatures. The idea was mentioned, without the Duke's knowledge, to his lawyer, Mr. Lane; by him it was communicated to Mr. Madden, the brewer; by him to Mr. George Andrews, the son of the auctioneer. A committee was formed, and Colonel Forbes was requested to discover in what light the proposed ball would be viewed at the castle. The Duke was kindly interested, the Duchess most amiable, — the ball was said to be under her especial patronage, — and her name was even suffered to appear in the printed bills; then, of course, all the world were to be present.

Katharine Ashton, working in that quiet parlour with her mother, had not the smallest idea of the excitement which was prevailing around her. The days of charity balls were long past, and she had never been present at one. It had not entered her head till she heard Selina talk, that any ball of any kind could come in her way. But it did seem a little tempting now; she did not wish to dance; she did not care to be finely dressed, but she thought it would be very pleasant to hear the band of music, and see the room lighted; and as Selina ran on with her folly, though Katharine knew it to be folly, she did not think that the world was quite as much out of its mind as she had at first imagined.

"There, I must go now," said Selina at length. "Mamma will scold me like any thing if I don't get home before four. She promised to take me to Miss Dyer's to see what things she has got."—"Beginning betimes, I see, Miss Selly," said the laughing voice of Mr. Ashton. He had just come in from the shop, and had caught the last words; "Why what a figure you will cut at the ball!" Selina was not very fond of Mr. Ashton; she never could make up her mind whether or not he was laughing at her; and she would have been afraid of him, only that it would have been placing him too much on an equality,—and she never forgot the shop. "Colonel Forbes has been in, talking about the ball, Kitty," continued Mr. Ashton, "and he says he hopes to see you there." Katharine looked up in wonder. "Me! father; I never spoke to him." "More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows," exclaimed Mr. Ashton, who was evidently labouring under some pleasurable excitement; "the Colonel knows you, if you don't know him. He told me he passed you in the road the day before yesterday."—"Oh! yes, I remember now," said Katharine, "just by the lower lodge at Maplestead; you recollect, don't you, Selina?"—"To be sure; he and Jane Sinclair were having a lovers' walk. How foolish they looked when we came up!" and Selina laughed in a way which made Katharine feel cross. "I suppose all persons walk together when they are engaged to be married," she said, rather sharply; "there was nothing very foolish that I could see; at any rate, it would have been much more foolish in us to interrupt them."—"In you, of course," said Selina, tossing her head; "because you don't visit them." Katharine only smiled, and turning to her father, asked if he knew whether Miss Sinclair would be at the ball? "I suppose so; of course, indeed, she will be," was the reply. "It is to be a ball for every one,—a Union Ball. The Colonel and I have been having a little talk about the

state of things in Rilworth. It is not at all satisfactory, he says, and I agree with him. There is a want of the unity, the sympathy, there ought to be; there is no fellow-feeling in the town, and things never will go right till there is."—"And do you think the ball will help to produce the fellow-feeling, father?" asked Katharine,—and she laid down her work, and waited with real interest for the answer. But Selina broke in: "To be sure it will, Kate. I would lay any thing that when George Andrews and young Madden are dancing in the same room, they will forget all their quarrels, and be quite friends again. There's nothing like dancing for making people friends."—"Begging your pardon, Miss Selly, that's all nonsense," said Mr. Ashton. "It's not George Andrews, nor George any body, that's particularly thought of, but the town in general. It is the tone of the town, the Colonel says, which will be improved by having a Union Ball. Depend upon it we shan't have all those upstart looks, and airs, and graces from the Miss Maddens, and the Miss Lanes, when they find that other people have as good a right to dance and be merry as themselves. I thought," continued Mr. Ashton, "the Colonel spoke particularly well upon the subject, and he said he should make a point of being there himself, and he meant to bring a large party with him."—"But, father," said Katharine, "it does not seem to me exactly clear how people are to be at all the more friends for dancing together in the same room just for one night. They will go away and forget it, and after all I dare say some of them will take offence."—"That's because you don't understand the working of things, Kitty," replied Mr. Ashton. "What we want in this country is unity. There is no question of that. We have no unity amongst us. Now if we can but get up something which all may join in,—a meeting for some one purpose,—people will begin to feel they have something in common; and it is not only the town folks, but the country people,—for they will all come, Colonel Forbes says. He has taken to the idea himself mightily. It is just what he has been aiming at for years, he tells me, to bring people together in a hearty, cordial way. So you see, Kitty, you must go, and what is more, I must give you a fine new dress, I suppose."—"White muslin, with pink bows down it,—that's the most genteel," said Selina. "It was what I wore when I went to the Maddens' great party last Christmas. I am going to have blue silk for the ball; I am tired of white, and blue does best with my complexion."—"And blue is somebody's favourite colour, I suppose," said Mr. Ashton, slyly. Selina pretended to look angry, and put up her hand to her face

as if she thought she was blushing, but she managed to say very boldly, "If you mean Mr. John, he would have given his eyes to have seen me in pink; but I protested I would have blue, and blue it is to be."—"I shall look very droll in a white muslin dress, with pink bows," said Katharine; "I never put on such a thing in my life before; and then my arms are so red!"—"Oh, nonsense Kate," exclaimed Selina; "with white kid gloves, who need ever care for red arms? I didn't think you had been so vain, did you, Mr. Ashton?"—"My Kitty vain!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton. "No, Miss Selly, we leave that for other people. But any how, Kitty, I told Colonel Forbes you would go to the ball, and I am to let him know at the gas committee this evening how many tickets we shall want." A knock at the private door interrupted the conversation. Mr. Ashton returned to the shop, and Selina rose to make her escape. Katharine's acquaintances were not considered quite on a level with herself, and she was always a little afraid of an introduction. "Well then! I may say that Colonel Forbes and Jane Sinclair are sure to be at the ball," she exclaimed, in a low voice. Kate stood up suddenly, her face was crimson, and when Selina turned round, Jane Sinclair was standing in the passage behind her.

They certainly were a great contrast—Jane, with her very neat dress, her simple grace and refinement; and Selina, with her loud voice and boisterous manner, her showy silk and rustling flounces, and the bonnet, half off her head, a perfect garden of flowers. Jane bowed, distantly; she might have heard Selina's words,—at any rate, it was supposed she had—and Selina rushed by like a whirlwind. Jane, however, was very self-possessed—much more so than Katharine, who looked annoyed. Jane shook hands heartily, and then she sat down and spoke about the weather,—and there was a pause, which was a little awkward. Katharine took up her work, and asked if Miss Sinclair would excuse her going on with it—it was for her brother, and she was anxious to finish it.

The ice was broken then—there was a subject to begin upon; and Jane hoped she had not come at an inconvenient hour; she had chosen it because it seemed the least likely to be the dinner hour. "We dine at half-past twelve," said Katharine, "and drink tea at half-past five, and have supper between nine and ten; the hours suit with the shop better than any others."—"And I suppose you are often out in the afternoon," observed Jane. "It was about four, I think, when we met you the other day at Maplestead." The *we* was spoken without hesitation. Jane had an

instinctive perception that she was safe with Katharine Ashton. —“Yes; but I don’t often walk as far as Maplestead,” replied Katharine. “My brother persuaded me that afternoon to go some way with him; but then he saw Colonel Forbes, and left me and Selina to go and speak to him upon business.” —“I saw your brother with Colonel Forbes,” observed Jane; “and I heard also what the business was, though I did not ask.” —“John did not tell me what it was,” replied Katharine. —Jane looked surprised, and a little embarrassed. “Then, perhaps I am only interfering in mentioning it,” she said; “but I called — partly to see you, and partly because Colonel Forbes thought you might know something about your brother’s plans.” —“Was it about a farm?” said Katharine, looking up eagerly from her work. —“Yes, a farm your brother wishes to take, I believe. Is he quite resolved upon being a farmer?” —“He would like to farm his own estate,” said Katharine, with a smile, which had a good deal of care in it. “Perhaps, Miss Sinclair, Colonel Forbes would talk to my father about it: he is the proper person to consult about John’s schemes.” —Jane was silent; she felt thrown back. “It is very good of you to interest yourself about him,” said Katharine; “I don’t mean to be ungracious.” She spoke so simply and cordially that Jane’s reserve was broken through. “You never used to be ungracious when we were at Miss Richardson’s,” she said, “so I should think you very much altered if you were so now.” —“I say out what I think so soon,” said Katharine, —“that is my fault; but I don’t mean any thing but what I say, —and I do feel it very kind of you to trouble about John.” —“Only, I am afraid I can do no good,” said Jane. —“Not in helping him to a farm,” replied Katharine —“at least, that is what I think. I can’t fancy him fitted for it, Miss Sinclair; he knows so little about farming; he has only been trying to learn lately.” —“So Colonel Forbes feared,” replied Jane; “but he must have some taste or fancy for it to have taken up the idea.” —“He has a fancy to be married,” said Katharine, her bright eyes sparkling with a momentary feeling of amusement, —“but he has no other fancy that I know of.” Jane seemed puzzled; and Katharine, feeling that her words required some explanation, added —“I may say it to you, because every one knows it — he wants to marry Selina Fowler.” —“Oh! indeed;” and Jane seemed sorry, yet still perplexed. —“You know what Selly was at school;” continued Katharine; “she is just the same now, only grander; and she looks down upon John, and upon all of us, —and that, I am sure, can’t make him happy. But John thinks it would be a fine thing to give up the shop and

live in the country; and he has great notions that, if he could marry Selina, such people as Mrs. Madden and Mrs. Lane would visit them, and then they should be what he calls up in the world. I don't mind saying all that to you," she added—though a blush crimsoned her face—"I know you will understand."—"Yes," said Jane, thoughtfully: "he is not very unlike the rest of the world."—"Everybody wants to get up higher," said Katharine, quickly; "but why should they? why can't we all be as we are?"—"We should be happier," said Jane, and a sigh escaped her. Perhaps she was conscious of not being entirely free from such a wish herself. "And more true and honest-minded," continued Katharine, "People are so double when they are pushing themselves on. Selly Fowler doesn't mean to be double, but she is; she comes and talks to me when she has no one else to talk to, and gets me to help her make her dresses; but she doesn't care to notice me when she is with the Miss Maddens. However, that is very wrong of me; I ought not to say any thing against Selly—only it comes out naturally when I talk of her."—"And so you are quite contented, are you, Katharine?" asked Jane. The tone had much in it of the easy unreserve of school-days. Katharine paused. "Not quite contented, I think," she said, whilst her fingers moved quickly and almost nervously. "I should like"—and she threw aside her work suddenly, and fixed her deep, earnest gaze upon Jane's face—"I should like, Miss Sinclair, to know what use one is in the world."—"That is just the kind of question you used to ask poor Miss Richardson," said Jane, laughing, "and she never knew how to answer you."—"Nobody can answer me," said Katharine; "I don't ask many people now—no one, indeed; but I thought," she added, "when I happened to be at church the Sunday before last, in the evening, that I should like to ask Mr. Reeves."—"Don't you know him? have you never spoken to him?" asked Jane.—"I saw him once, just after he came," replied Katharine; "he called to ask if I could help at all in the Sunday school. I believe some one had told him it was likely I would; but my mother did not like my going away from breakfast on Sunday mornings, and so it came to nothing. Mrs. Reeves called twice afterwards; but I was not at home, and she only saw my mother. I think, though,"—and Katharine's face lighted up with eagerness,—"I feel nearly sure Mr. Reeves could tell me some things if I could talk to him."—"I think he could tell you a great many things," replied Jane; "but what was it he said which put the wish to see him into your head?"—"It was about working," said Katharine, "and it is that which is always puzzling

me. You don't work as I do, Miss Sinclair, and you have not the need; yet still you do something, and every one does something; but it seems as if it was all for ourselves,—and that grows tiresome, and does not seem much good: of course, though, you don't feel it, because you do good to the poor people.”—Jane was giving her attention to what was said, yet it was with an air of inward thought all the time.—“I remember that sermon,” she replied, as Katharine stopped for an instant; “it was about unity.”—“Yes; people's working for one object, and each having a part to do, which could not be done by any one else—like masons and carpenters building a house. It was a very pleasant notion; and when I came home I felt as if I could make tea, and stitch wristbands, and keep accounts, much more cheerfully if I thought it was part of a great business going on in the world, and not my own small one.”—“I must beg Mr. Reeves to call upon you again, Katharine,” said Jane, laughing; “he will rejoice to find any one in Rilworth who has a notion of working.”—“I don't think I have much notion of it,” replied Katharine, “and I have very little time; but it would make me more one with people, Miss Sinclair, to have to work with them, than to go to a ball and dance with them? and this is what every one is talking about now.”—Jane did not appear at first to recollect,—“A ball?” she said. “Oh! I remember. Are you going to it?”—“They want me to go,” replied Katharine, “but I don't know whether I shall. I should like it well enough, I dare say, when once there, but I am sure I should not be one bit the better friends with other people for it.”—“No!” exclaimed Jane, “who could think you would be?”—“A good many people, I believe,” said Katharine; “I fancy,” she added, with some hesitation, “that Colonel Forbes does.” Jane coloured, and was silent.—“You must have heard of the ball?” continued Katharine.—Jane's answer sounded rather abrupt, in spite of her gentle voice. “Yes, it has been mentioned to me.”—She waited for a second; and then, suddenly turning from the subject, exclaimed, “I have not mentioned now what I principally came for—to thank you very much for the half-sovereign for the District Society.”—“It won't go far amongst the poor people,” said Katharine, “but I had nothing else; I will give you some more when I have.”—“Give it to Mr. Reeves, you mean,” said Jane, smiling, in spite of herself, at Katharine's open way of speaking of her charities.—“It is all the same,” said Katharine; “but it was hard to think of what you said of the poor people, and not do something for them. I thought of asking, too, if you did not think it interfering, if I could ever go on a

message for you, or do any thing for you in your district? Sometimes, when you are wishing to take a walk, it might be a convenience, and I can generally get out a little while in the afternoon."—"Would you really? It would be very kind." Jane's face became quite animated. "I would go now, this afternoon, or any time," said Katharine; "I will go at once, if there is any thing to do," she added, as she stood up and began to fold her work. Jane laughed, quite merrily for her.—"Oh! Katharine," she exclaimed, "how like you are now to what you were at Miss Richardson's!"—Katharine's answer was grave, and very earnest;—"And so are you like, too, Miss Sinclair; it would be strange if I did not wish to help you."

Jane went home to meet Colonel Forbes. He had been very busy all the morning in making arrangements for the ball. It was a thing he liked, for he had a good deal of taste, and every one in Rilworth deferred to his opinion. He felt himself so popular too all the time, making friends with Mr. Madden and Mr. Lane, and consulting Mr. Ashton, and others of the influential tradespeople! And popularity had many charms for him, though he was not sure that he should stand for the borough at the next election. He came back to Jane in what, for a person of his calm, rather stiff manners, was a state of excitement, to tell her what he had been doing, and especially the half message he had sent to Katharine Ashton. He thought it would please her; she was so full of consideration herself, and so glad of any thing which promoted kind feelings amongst others.—"I told Ashton she must come," he said, as he threw himself into an arm-chair, declaring that he was almost too tired for a walk.—"She is just the sort of girl who will look well, because she has no airs and graces. I can fancy the Duchess of Lowther taking to her immensely."—"Is it very stupid of me not to see the great benefit which the Duchess of Lowther's notice could be to Katharine?" said Jane, and a smile lurked around her mouth whilst she looked timidly in Colonel Forbes' face.—"Yes, it is very stupid of you," he replied pettishly, "when I have been setting my heart upon pleasing you. The Duchess of Lowther's notice may not do any literal good to Katharine Ashton; it may not be a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, and that I suppose is what is to be understood by good; but it is an honour that any girl in her position may be proud of. What are you thinking of now?" he added, catching hold of Jane's hand, as with rather a grave face she was turning away from him. Jane hesitated. "What are you thinking of—I must know?" he repeated. "Why, that you puzzle me," said

Jane, quickly, "and that you have puzzled me ever since this odious ball was mentioned. You would not care whether the Duchess of Lowther noticed me."—"Noticed you!" he repeated, starting from his seat—"notice my intended wife. I should not wish the queen to notice you!"—"Because your notice is a sufficient honour," said Jane, playfully; "I am glad you have so good an opinion of yourself." Colonel Forbes looked a little annoyed. "You may put what construction you please, Jane, upon my words," he said; "but surely you see the difference between a person standing, as my wife must do, upon her own ground, requiring no support, and a person like Katharine Ashton, who is really nobody, and to whom support is every thing."—"But suppose we differ upon the premises," said Jane, with a smile which had the effect of softening the frown upon Colonel Forbes' face. "Suppose I think that Katharine Ashton has ground to stand upon as well as myself, and that she does not require any more support."—"Then, my love, I think you are speaking ignorantly, and know nothing about the constitution of society." Jane Sinclair had a marvellous temper. She might have spoilt a much better man than Colonel Forbes; yet even she could not help feeling a little hurt at the tone in which this was said; but she did not reply to it, she was too humble. And how, indeed, could a man like Colonel Forbes be faulty in her sight? Clever, polished, handsome, with high-sounding words at command, and devoting his life, as it seemed, to works of public utility—above all, seen with eyes blinded by a first affection—Jane could not doubt him. When they differed she said to herself that it was the innate difference between men and women which made them view things differently. One question only she asked now, and it was chiefly to turn the conversation—"why, if he had such an idea of the good which it would do to bring all classes more closely together, he objected to her going to the Union Ball?" "Because we keep our choicest treasures screened from the common gaze," was the answer; and the words fell so sweetly upon Jane's ear that she forgot to inquire into their wisdom.

CHAPTER VIII.

"So you and Kitty are going finery hunting this afternoon, wife?" said Mr. Ashton, as he sat down to dinner with only his wife and daughter, about a week after the first mention of the Union Ball.

—Mr. Ashton was in particularly good spirits: he had just made a successful sale of some valuable books, and he was upon the point of satisfying his hunger with a roast duck, which happened to be one of his weak points. It would have been strange if he had not been pleased. “Miss Dyer has not much left, I am afraid,” replied Mrs. Ashton; “Kitty has been so long making up her mind whether she will go to the ball.”—“And she doesn’t look very bright about it now,” continued Mr. Ashton. “What in the world has come over you of late, Kitty? One would think by your face that you were ninety instead of nineteen.”—“Perhaps it is a pity that I am not ninety,” said Katharine, smiling; “because if I were, I should not have to go to the ball, and then there would be no cause to look grave. But, father, I think you would be of my mind if you had to dress yourself up in white muslin, and dance about in a room with the Duchess of Lowther looking at you.” Mr. Ashton burst into a hearty fit of laughter. “Well, child, it might be I should; but I don’t see why you are to care for the Duchess of Lowther, or the Duchess of any thing. Why, hasn’t one human being as good a right to dance as another?”—“I should not care a bit for the Duchess of Lowther here,” said Katharine, —“in this room I mean. If she were to come in this moment, I could do my work, and talk about her business (if she had any), and feel as good in my way as she is in hers; and I should not care a bit either in the shop, if I was there; but somehow, father, that great room at the ‘Bear’ is not like home, and I shall not feel like myself when I have pink bows stuck about me, and I shall think that the Duchess of Lowther is laughing at me, which I know she couldn’t do here, because there would be nothing to laugh at.”—“I don’t see what there will be to laugh at there,” said Mrs. Ashton, in a quick tone of anticipated anger; “you had three quarters’ dancing at Miss Richardson’s, and every one said you did very well.”—“And you danced away as merrily as a Scotch lassie last year at our neighbour Carter’s,” said Mr. Ashton.—“Because I knew every body there,” replied Katharine; “and I was quite at home, and it was great fun going down the country dance, but I don’t know any thing about new-fashioned dancing; and Selly says there will be none but that at the ball, because it won’t be genteel.”—“Well, then,” said Mrs. Ashton, “if you can’t dance in the new way, Kate, you must dance in the old, that’s easily enough settled.”—“Only that the new-fashioned people will carry it all their own way,” said Katharine, “and there will be only one band for us all.” Mrs. Ashton looked a little discomfited at this obvious objection, and was con-

tented with murmuring that she did not care a bit about the ball, but she did not like her child to be different from other people. "That is just what John Carter was saying to me this morning," said Mr. Ashton. "'It is not,' says he, 'that one cares to go oneself, but one does care to be put aside;,' so honest John means to go." — "John Carter at a ball!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, "who would have thought it!" — "There'll be many a worse man there," said Mr. Ashton, "let them be as high grandees as they may; and I should just like to see any of them looking down upon John Carter; as respectable a man as any in Rilworth, as I heard Colonel Forbes declaring to-day. Give me the leg of that duck, Mrs. Ashton, and Kate, child, take the wing; you are not eating any thing to-day." Katharine hesitated a moment, and then said quietly: "I think, mother, the wing would be rather nice for Jemmy Dawes, in Long Lane, and I could take it there this afternoon. His arm hurts him a great deal, and he doesn't eat much." — "Jemmy Dawes, Kate!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, "who is he?" — "Only the child that was nearly run over the other day," said Mrs. Ashton. "But Miss Sinclair looks after him, Kate, and if you go there you won't have time for Miss Dyer's." — "Only I thought, mother," said Katharine, "that perhaps you would go up to Miss Dyer's first, and look over the things, and see what you like, and then I might come to you afterwards. It isn't very far to Long Lane." — "But you can't take a plate about the streets," said Mr. Ashton; "you will look as if you were coming from an eating house." — "Which will be quite true," said Katharine, gaily, "and all the more reason that one should help others to eat. But, mother, you did not mind when I carried the rice pudding to Mrs. Carter, when she was ill." — "That was different," said Mrs. Ashton, "they are old friends; but I don't see why, if Miss Sinclair is a district visitor, she is not to take care of her own poor." — "It's her duty," exclaimed Mr. Ashton; "so finish your dinner, Kitty, and let us have no more of this nonsense. What's the use of my bringing you up to be a careful, modest girl, not even letting you come into the shop, if you are to go gadding about by yourself in all the back lanes of Rilworth?" — "You will make yourself quite talked about by and by," echoed Mrs. Ashton, assuming a courageous tone; "to my certain knowledge you have been down to Long Lane twice this week." — "But Long Lane is not a very bad place, mother, is it?" said Katharine: "I am sure I have heard it is not as bad as Pebble Street, and Betsey Carter goes there every day of her life." — "Betsey Carter is a good deal older than you, Katharine," said Mrs. Ashton:

she always said "Katharine" when she wished to be peculiarly emphatic. "And I don't want you to be like Betsey Carter," continued Mr. Ashton, "and that's more to the point. To my mind she is a set up girl, always going to district meetings, or teachers' meetings, or committees, and thinking herself a saint; and all the time only caring to get invited to drink tea at the Rectory. That is not what I call religion. I like people to keep their station, and I don't think there is any good done when they try to go out of it, and I wonder, for my part, that Mr. Reeves can bear it. I declare the way that girl spoke to him the other day in my shop, was quite a scandal; just as if she was the person who knew every thing and he knew nothing. No good can come of it, I'm sure. I have had a bad opinion of District Societies, ever since I found how it took people out of their proper place; and I don't want ever to see you having any thing to do with them, Kitty."

Katharine was silenced, but she did not eat the wing of the duck.

Mr. Ashton stood a little moodily by the fire when dinner was over. He had an uncomfortable impression of the conversation. So also had Katharine; but Mrs. Ashton talked for both; and as she busied herself in giving a little help to the maid who took away the dinner things, and assisting Katharine in folding up the table-cloth, and sweeping the crumbs from the floor, lest her new carpet should be spoilt, she discoursed upon things in general, and Miss Dyer in particular. "It would be no good," she said, "for her to go to Miss Dyer's alone; she shouldn't in the least be able to tell what to choose; not that she fancied indeed that Kate would know much better; she was never much given to dress; but of course if she was to wear the gown, it was proper she should choose it."—"Why not go to Selly Fowler, mother?" said Kate in a tone of amusement: "she has been buying dresses for every one she tells me—Matty and Susan Andrews, and the youngest Miss Madden, and,—as she says, one of the Miss Lanes, but that I don't quite believe, for she does not know them well enough."—"Well to be sure, that is a good notion!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton; "not that I should like Selly to think we hadn't just as good taste as she has, she is set up enough without that; but it might be as well to get a notion of what she means to wear, that you mightn't have the same."—"No fear of that," replied Katharine, a little frightened, for she had spoken hastily, and had no real idea of putting herself in the power of Selina's taste. "Selly means to wear blue silk, and I am to have white muslin and pink bows—you mustn't forget them. Fancy me, father,"

she added, turning to her father, and laying her hand playfully on his shoulder, "fancy me done all over with pink bows—shan't I look like a walking rose-tree?"—"A cabbage-rose," said Mr. Ashton, relaxing into a smile, as he patted her cheeks. "What a woman you are grown, Kate, this last year! and what a colour you've got in your cheeks! quite the colour for a painter, as Colonel Forbes said to me this morning." Katharine's colour became something deeper than that of a cabbage-rose. "I will go with you, mother, to choose the dress," she said, "and we need not ask Selly any thing about it. You know better than she does what is good muslin and what is bad, and that is the chief point."—"Yes; muslin will wash, that is one good thing," said Mrs. Ashton, after thinking for a moment; "and if there were to come any other ball this winter, you might trim it up with green, or blue, and people wouldn't know it to be the same."—"And if there weren't any more balls, it would cut up into something useful," said Katharine; "I shan't so much care if it is muslin, mother."—"But you will want some other fineries, child," observed Mr. Ashton. He had been paid for his books in ready money—gold—it was heavy in his pocket, and he was in a hurry to relieve himself from it. "Nothing but the bows," said Katharine, kissing him, "they will be fine enough for any one."—"Nonsense, Kate," exclaimed Mr. Ashton, "you must have some ornaments. Why, there's Miss Selly will come out like a jeweller's shop, and I don't choose to have my girl looked down upon."—"There's her grandmother's brooch, with the red garnet in the middle and the blue stones round it," said Mrs. Ashton. "I have heard say that the garnet is a great beauty."—"Grandmother's fiddlestick!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton. "Why, wife, you would have the child look as if she had lived a hundred years ago. What do you think Colonel Forbes, and the Duchess of Lowther, and all the grandees would say if they saw her with her grandmother's brooch on?"—"Just as much as they would say if they saw me without it, father," said Katharine, laughing. "But I should like," she added, as she caught the disappointed expression of Mr. Ashton's face,—"I should like, father, to have something new and pretty if I might; if it would not cost very much, and if there was a place for your hair, and mother's, and John's in it."—"Well then! if one must—you girls are dreadfully extravagant; but I suppose you must have your way. There,"—and he threw down three sovereigns on the table,—"be off with you, and don't trouble me any more with your follies."—"All for myself, father?" said Katharine, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Who else should

it be for? Take it, child, and say thank you."—Katharine threw her arms round him and gave him not a kiss but a hug. Mr. Ashton withdrew himself from her gently, ashamed of the weakness which made a tear glisten in his eye. "Only one more word; father," said Katharine, following him to the door leading into the shop. "If the brooch should not cost all that, might I have what is left for my own, to do just as I like with?"—"Dig a hole and bury it if you like," was the reply; "only run away now, for there's the Duchess's carriage stopping."

CHAPTER IX.

"MOTHER," said Katharine, as she came down stairs dressed for walking, "I suppose it won't do for me to carry that piece of duck to Long Lane, as my father says he had rather not?"—"You have got your Sunday dress on," said Mrs. Ashton, "why not let Susan carry it?"—"I thought she would be busy, putting away the dinner things," replied Katharine, "so I did not like to ask; but if she might go?"—"To be sure, there are the dishes to be washed up," pondered Mrs. Ashton: "let it stay to-day, Kitty; your father may like the wing of the duck for supper."—"I thought we could get him some toasted cheese," replied Katharine; "and the boy is very weak, and I don't think he is likely to have any thing from Mrs. Sinclair's to-day, because Miss Sinclair told me they were going into the country for a visit, so there is not likely to be a dinner dressed, except for the servants. We might go to Miss Dyer's first, and come in for the duck afterwards, if you liked, mother. He is a very nice little boy," she added, "and he is Anne Crossin's nephew." Mrs. Ashton was uncomfortably tender-hearted. One reason why she never liked to hear about her poor neighbours was that it made her unhappy. She stood in the passage considering,—moved to the door, came back again, and exclaimed, half angrily, "What a girl you are, Kitty, for having your own way! There, go and fetch a basket, and let me take the duck myself, and hear no more about it."—"Oh! mother, I could not let you do that."—"Why not, child? it is not fifty yards, and Susan must wash the dishes."—"Then you will let me go too, and show you the house; my father can't be angry at that," said Katharine; and not waiting for the permission, she ran off to the kitchen, where the remnants of the dinner were lying on the

dresser, searched the closets for a basket, seized the much-talked-of duck's wing, and put it into a small plate, with the two remaining potatoes, and covering the whole with a saucer, and adding a tolerably large piece of bread, was standing again at her mother's side before Mrs. Ashton had at all made up her mind whether she was not giving herself very unnecessary trouble. "What a girl you are!" was again Mrs. Ashton's comment, "no sooner said than done."—"Well, dear mother, and how else is one to get through the world?" replied Katharine. She hung the basket on her arm so as to be least noticed, and they walked up the street together; Katharine amused at having had her own way, and pleasing herself with thinking how the child would enjoy his dinner; Mrs. Ashton in a ceaseless fidget, lest the gravy of the duck (of which, however, there was a very small proportion) should somehow or other get through the basket, and spoil Kitty's best gown. Happily that thought so possessed her mind, that she did not see Mrs. Fowler and Selina on the opposite side of the street, and so was not troubled with any fears as to their noticing the basket, and wondering where she was going.

Jemmy Dawes was left in the cottage alone, sitting on a stool almost touching the dusty bars of the little fire-place,—a happy circumstance for Mrs. Ashton's sympathies. She had a great dread of fire, and an idea that parents who allowed their children to be in a room without a guard, were quite answerable for murder. The first questions which she put to the child were, what had become of his aunt, and his grandmother, and his uncle, and in fact, all his relations, and why they had gone away from him, and what he would do if a coal hopped out; questions which, if not tending much to the child's ultimate safety, had the effect of bringing out a good deal of the history of his family, poverty, sickness, and sorrow; dragged forth, as it were, to light, from his simplicity. Mrs. Ashton was much excited. "It was a shame," she said, "a downright shame, to leave a child of that age; not to set any one to watch him; not put up a guard; not even to beg a neighbour to look in upon him! But the poor were always so thoughtless; really it seemed as if they hadn't the same feelings as other folks. A fortunate thing it was for the child that they had happened to come; he might have been burnt to death ten times over, for any thing his aunt or his grandmother seemed to care; and so easily too! "There, my man! you will like this, shan't you?" she said, uncovering the basket. The little fellow raised his watery eyes to her with a smile, but he did not say any thing. Don't you think now, Kitty, he might as well eat it whilst

we are here, and then there will be no fear of his tumbling into the fire at the same time?" Katharine did not precisely perceive the connection of the two actions, but she was very willing to see that the poor child had what they had brought for him, and that it was not shared with a set of hungry cousins. Mrs. Ashton peeped into a cupboard, and took out a knife, and as no fork was to be found, she managed to cut off the meat from the bone by the help of a knife and a teaspoon, praising herself as she did so for having such a clever thought; and looking at the boy from time to time with evident satisfaction, as with hungry eyes he watched the progress of his dinner preparations. Then she made a table of a wooden chair, and moving the child far enough away, as she said, from any hopping coals, told him to begin and eat fast, lest any one else should come in and want it. "Ise to say grace first," said the boy, raising himself with difficulty from his little seat. He stood up, and joined his hands together, and repeated something quite unintelligible. "Well! that is odd," whispered Mrs. Ashton to Kate, "who would have thought it?"—"Did your aunt teach you to say grace, Jemmy?" asked Katharine. "No, it wasn't aunt, it was the lady," said Jemmy, speaking with his mouth so full that Katharine was obliged to make him repeat the words. "Miss Sinclair, I suppose," said Mrs. Ashton, in an under tone, "these district ladies are always rather given to Methodism."—"But it is quite right, mother," said Katharine, "you know how careful you always were to make John and me say grace when we were children."—"Oh! yes, quite right, only odd; I should have thought a lady like Miss Sinclair, going to be married too, as they say, would have had something else to think of than teaching a little urchin like that to say grace." Katharine made no answer; her eye at the moment caught a streak of blue sky gleaming through the dusky window pane, and something crossed her mind—a feeling more truly than a thought, which, if she had put it into words, might have been a question whether the nearest and dearest of earthly interests, even marrying and giving in marriage, could really be placed in importance above the work of training, even in the slightest degree, an immortal soul for heaven.

"There, now we are out of that close lane, and you can take my arm, Kate," said Mrs. Ashton, as they turned into High Street together. "I shan't want you to go there often, you'll catch a fever if you do." Katharine did not urge the point, she was satisfied that she had done her duty for the day, and she did feel at the moment that the air in the broad street was much more pleasant than that in the little cottage. So they walked on,

settling where they should go first, and Katharine entering much more into the pleasant prospect of her new brooch, now that she had disposed to her satisfaction of the wing of the duck. "I declare there is George Andrews coming out of the 'Bear' with Colonel Forbes and Mr. Lane," said Mrs. Ashton. "They have been having a talk about the room of course. Let me see, it is those three windows to the right which make the ball room, isn't it, Kate?"—"Five windows, mother," replied Katharine; "that is, there is a partition between, which they take down when they want it."—"Five windows! well that will hold a good heap. The more the merrier, as my grandmother used to say when we sat down five-and-twenty to roast goose and boiled beef on Michaelmas-day. And there is Charlie Ronaldson with them, what is he doing there I wonder?"—"Nothing, I should think," said Katharine, looking across the street. "You know, mother, he is going somewhere to learn land surveying, but it is not quite settled yet, and so till it is he has not any thing to do except what he makes for himself."—"He is a very genteel young man," observed Mrs. Ashton. "I sometimes think whether he won't cut out John in Selly Fowler's good graces."—"No fear of that," replied Katharine, as she watched more attentively the group standing in front of the "Bear." "He is too quiet a good deal for Selly. But do look," she added, "how George Andrews is holding forth. And Colonel Forbes listening as if George was prime minister."—"Is not that good now?" said Mrs. Ashton.

George Andrews, a shrewd, low-browed, red-haired young man, of about six-and-twenty, certainly was stating his opinion with an air of great authority, lifting his fore-finger, and turning from Colonel Forbes to Mr. Lane, and from Mr. Lane to Colonel Forbes, wishing, it would seem, to convince them of some fact which apparently they were not inclined to contradict. "What a great man George has become since he has been on this ball committee!" observed Katharine, "a much greater than Charlie Ronaldson ever was or ever will be. Greatness is not in his way."—"George has such a wonderful pushing way," observed Mrs. Ashton. "Yes," replied Katharine, "as my father said to me the other day, one would think he had been practising all his life selling himself by auction. But mother, see, they are moving away; if we cross the street now we shall be sure to meet them; do let us wait." No; that was not in Mrs. Ashton's way; she was not at all inclined to let slip such an opportunity of hearing all that had been said or done about the ball,

and Katharine's observation only had the effect of so quickening her movements that, in her haste to be on the opposite side of the way before the gentlemen had gone by, she put herself in danger of being run over by a baker's cart. "How d'ye do? How d'ye do?" was her salutation to George, accompanied by a pause which he could not but notice, and he stopped and spoke, though it cut short something he was saying to Mr. Lane. Mr. Lane and Mrs. Ashton did not know each other, Mr. Lane therefore walked on. Colonel Forbes moved as if he meant to do the same, and then, as with a sudden recollection of duty, he paused: "Mrs. Ashton, I am so glad to have the opportunity of seeing you. I hope your husband told you what I was saying to him this morning. Miss Ashton, I trust we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the ball on the 15th."—"My daughter is very much honoured, I am sure," said Mrs. Ashton, with a half-bow half-curtsey, and her really handsome face was radiant as a sunbeam. Katharine neither bowed nor curtsied, but said, "Thank you, sir, I think I am going."—"And you will come early, I hope," said the Colonel, "we don't want to make it a very late business. The Duchess does not fancy very late hours, and we must have supper about eleven; that is, if our friend Mr. Andrews can be brought to consent."—"Twelve, Colonel, not one moment earlier, if you want to do what people like," said George. "Nobody will get into the fun of dancing before eleven, and if you break it up then, the thing will go off flat."—"Well, then, we must have a little private supper for the Duchess and her party at any hour her Grace pleases. You won't object to that, Mrs. Ashton. Miss Ashton, I dare say you are of Mr. Andrews' opinion, and don't like the thought of having your dance broken up too soon."—"I don't know, sir," replied Katharine, "I should think every body would like best to do what the Duchess of Lowther wishes, if she means to be there."—"Very courteous," said the Colonel, with a patronising smile, "but unfortunately every one else is not inclined to be equally amiable. But we shall make a compromise, I dare say. Mr. Andrews, we shall meet, I suppose, to-morrow—good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mrs. Ashton;" he half put out his hand to shake hands with Katharine; but she either did not or would not see it, and he bowed and walked away. "Now that is what I call upholding the people's rights," exclaimed George Andrews, stroking his red whiskers complacently, and looking round for applause. "If a ball is to be a Union Ball, as Colonel Forbes calls it, why is the Duchess of Lowther, or the Duchess of any thing to be con-

sulted?"—"Only because she will be the person of most importance in the room," observed Katharine. "Pooh!" replied George, rather unceremoniously, as he gave his hat a little self-conscious shake; "at a Union Ball nobody is of importance but the stewards. I have been saying that to the Colonel for the last half hour. 'Just see, Colonel,' said I, 'what will be the effect of the eleven o'clock supper; there will be,'"—He was stopped in his speech by Mrs. Ashton. "But I thought it was all settled, Mr. George, and that the Duchess was to have her supper alone, if she liked it, and every one else afterwards."—"It won't do, it won't do," replied George oracularly, "take my word for it, it won't. If the Duchess can't come and behave like other people, she had much better stay away. She will give offence, as sure as fate she will."—"Then it will be very unkind in people who take offence," said Katharine. "Why is not the Duchess to have her way as well as we ours?"—"Because she is one and we are many," replied George; and he drew himself up with an air which betokened that he had settled the question entirely to his own satisfaction. "She only wants to have supper alone," persisted Katharine, "that won't trouble us."—"I beg your pardon, Miss Ashton, my time is precious, I can't stay to argue the point." George Andrews gave a contemptuous farewell nod, and hurried away.

"If the Duchess is to be nobody at the ball, why should they make such a fuss about her having supper with every one?" said Katharine, as she and her mother walked slowly on towards Miss Dyer's. She had spoken almost as much to herself as to her mother, but her words were answered by a third person, Charles, or, as he was commonly called, Charlie Ronaldson; the son of a man who had formerly been bailiff to the Duke of Lowther, but who, from various family misfortunes, had lost large sums during his lifetime, and at his death left his only boy to make his way in the world by himself. When Mrs. Ashton had described Charles Ronaldson as a "genteel young man," she did not mean that he was a fashionable gentleman, he did not look like one; but he did look that which was far better—a man of intelligence and thought, and honourable feelings, with that simplicity of mind, the result of humility and self-respect, which, unconsciously to its possessor, refines and dignifies the general character and manner. He was a shy person,—very shy; it was rarely he found himself in an element that suited him, and so it was rarely that he found himself sufficiently at ease to talk. And he was a lonely man, with no brothers or sisters, his father dead, his relations for the most part at a distance. He had been educated at a good grammar school,

thanks to the Duke of Lowther's bounty ; since then he had been a good deal at home with his mother, whilst practising farming on the Duke's estate ; now he was going to apply himself to land-surveying, as Katharine had said,—still helped by the same hand. He was not too proud to begin life under an obligation, but the sense of it made him feel his position peculiar. He had no money to spend in amusements as other young men did—he had no capital upon which to calculate the chances of business, and raise up castles in futurity ; all that was to be done was to be the result of hard head labour ; and this for the present was his only thought,—how to work so as to place himself in a position where he might no longer be a burden to his benefactor. It was rather a careworn idea for a young man just entering the world ; and, combined with his early sorrows, poverty and the loss of his father, it had sobered him ; not made him melancholy, not robbed him of hope or the power of enjoyment, but sobered him ; so that he looked at life as a man many years older than himself—for he was only three-and-twenty—might have done, and this gave him a quietness of manner which was generally considered the most remarkable point about him. “That shy fellow, Ronaldson,” was the epithet by which he was most generally known, and by which Katharine had frequently heard him described. She was not prepared therefore for his venturing to walk up the street a few paces by her side, and even reply to her remark, though she had seen him lingering behind George Andrews during their short conversation, and noticed that he turned in the same direction as themselves. She quite started when he said, very awkwardly, as if he was scolding himself for the liberty he was taking:—“Miss Ashton, I don't think people do consider the Duchess of Lowther nobody.”

“I don't for one,” replied Katharine, trying not to smile at the odd way in which he turned round to glance at her, and then looked across to the other side of the street, apparently not in the least caring whether she answered him or not. “And I don't think it ever was intended that we should think her nobody, do you?” he continued. He was a little less shy at the second observation, and actually kept his face towards her whilst listening to the answer. “No,” replied Katharine, “why should she be called Duchess, if she is to be nobody?”—“But, my dear Kitty, you don't understand,” interrupted Mrs. Ashton. “You did not hear what George Andrews said. It is only at the ball—at this Union Ball—that we are not to have distinction ; and, upon second thought, I must say I have a notion he may be right. I should not care myself, but there's many I know who will think

it a great offence if the Duchess does not sit down to supper; the Dobsons for one. I heard Martha Dobson say myself yesterday, that half the fun at the ball would be making one with the grandees."—"Well," said Katharine, as if she was tired of the subject, "I don't see how it is to be settled; all I know is, that I never think that people are all one, except——" She stopped for an instant. "Except when?" asked Charles Ronaldson, and his hand was put forth, and then taken back, and then put forth again. He wanted her to see that he was going to say good-bye. "Except when they are in church," said Katharine, and she took the shy fingers in hers, and gave them a cordial shake. His face brightened up, and he said energetically, "Perhaps it is a pity that we are not always in church."—"Perhaps so," said Katharine. "Good-bye." She did not quite know what he meant; but they were close to Miss Dyer's shop, and she wanted to get rid of him. "It is bad beginning to talk to Charlie Ronaldson," she said laughingly to her mother as they went in; "he never has courage to leave off."—"But he is a good young man though," observed Mrs. Ashton; "I like Charlie very much, only I wish he would learn to look one in the face." Katharine wished the same; that awkward habit of looking away whenever he addressed any one, took off all, or nearly all, the pleasure she had in talking to him. She never knew whether he was listening to her or not.

CHAPTER X.

"CLEAR muslin, of course, Mrs. Ashton," said Miss Dyer, leading the way into the show-room, "and broad tucks."—"Yes, if it's the fashion. I should like it to be quite the fashion."—"Broad tucks is just the thing," replied Miss Dyer; "broad tucks, with a narrow edge of ribbon round the top; that's what we've just made for two or three ladies. I am sure you would like broad tucks with pink, Miss Katharine, or blue would look very pretty."—"I don't think it wants any ribbon," observed Katharine; "and, mother, I should not like to be exactly the same as any one else."—"Then pink on the shoulders and round the body would be extremely nice," continued the dress-maker, producing a roll of rather narrow pink ribbon, and folding it so as not to crease it. "That would be quite different from everybody, and you might have a pink sash and streamers to match; or, if you chose, pink

satin bows down the dress ; but in that case you must have a full skirt and no tucks. I can show you some beautiful patterns," and she opened the last number of the Dress Magazine, containing simpering ladies in all varieties of costume, and bodiless dresses of every newly invented pattern. Katharine was not in the least bewildered ; she had made up her mind before she came what her dress was to be, and she kept to her own taste. "I would rather not have more pink than I can help, mother," she said ; "and I should like," she added, turning to Miss Dyer, "to have my dress quite plain, with a folded cape like this," and she pointed to one in the magazine ; "and I should choose to have it full, without tucks ; and that broad pink ribbon will do very well for a sash, with a bow and ends in front. Mother, dear, that will please you, won't it ? You know all that narrow trimming will take a great deal, and it must be unripped every time the dress is washed, and so it will give a great deal of trouble."—"Just as you like, Kitty," said Mrs. Ashton, with a slight accent of disappointment. "The pink round the tail would smarten up the dress ; but, as you say, it must be unripped when the frock's washed, so have it your own way ; only do let it be a fashionable make, Miss Dyer."—"Oh, depend upon it, Mrs. Ashton—depend upon it ;—Miss Kate's first ball, and the Duchess to be there, and Lady Marchmont, and Lady Julia,—depend upon it, it shall be quite fashionable. Miss Katharine, if you please, I will just take your measure." That was an ordeal Katharine was not quite prepared for ; she generally made her own dresses, and she thought it very disagreeable to be turned and twisted about like a doll, and measured in length and breadth, and covered with thin white-brown paper, cut and slit, and pinned together. And Miss Dyer seemed never weary of giving gashes with her large scissors, and taking pins out of her mouth, and placing them in an ominous vicinity to Katharine's neck. And her mother was not likely to be weary either, for she was going round the room all the time, examining the caps hanging upon the mahogany stands ; so there seemed no prospect of an end. But it came at last ; and Katharine put on her dark shawl and straw bonnet, and thought how much more comfortable and at home she felt in them than she ever should in the white muslin. "White kid gloves, Miss Katharine ?" said Miss Dyer, just as Katharine had laid her finger on the handle of the door. "Oh, yes, I forgot." Katharine spoke a little impatiently, and Miss Dyer laughed, and said : "it was not many young girls of Miss Katharine's age that would be fussed at having to buy ball things. There was Miss Fowler and Miss

Madden, they had been a good two hours settling it all.”—“And did not content themselves after all, I dare say,” said Katharine. “Those gloves are my size, Miss Dyer! please will you put them up, and I will take them with me.” The gloves were put up, and Katharine ran gaily down the stairs, turning back, however, to whisper to her mother, who was still lingering and looking back at the caps, “Mother, dear, let me make your cap; you know mine suit you better than any, and I got a notion of a new trimming whilst I was being ‘tried on.’”

They went next to the jeweller’s. Katharine liked that much better than the dressmaker’s. She had long wished for a brooch with her father, and mother, and brothers’ hair in it; but she had never had courage to ask for it, it seemed such a foolish expense. Now her father himself wished her to spend the money, so she had no scruples. Several persons were in the shop, and they had to wait some time before they were attended to, and this gave Katharine an opportunity of examining all the brooches under the glass counter, and making up her mind what she should choose. Mrs. Ashton stood by her touching her elbow every now and then. “Look at that blue one, Kate, that’s a beauty, and that gold one with the red stone; why it’s nearly as large as your grandmother’s garnet, but I don’t like it as well, do you?” Katharine disliked blue stones, and was not very fond of red ones, but she did not wish to discuss them, for the Miss Maddens and Miss Lane were in the shop, giving orders for some hair bracelets, and she was quite sure that the youngest Miss Madden, who was a great gossip, was listening to all she and her mother were saying. “Why, Katharine, what are you doing here?” she heard some one behind her exclaim in a noisy voice just as the shopman had found time to attend to her. “How do you do, Selina?” replied Katharine very quietly, giving her hand without answering the question. “I like that plain gold one best,” she added, addressing her mother in a low voice, “because I can wear it always, and it has such a good place for hair.” Selina looked over her shoulder, “Choosing brooches, I declare. Well! who would have thought that?”—“Choosing what?” asked Miss Julia Madden, coming up to Selina. Katharine could not help hearing her, neither could she avoid noticing that Selina walked away directly to the other end of the shop, and that both began laughing. “Mother, do you mind my having the plain brooch?” she continued. “No, not exactly, if you wish it; but, Kitty, do look at Miss Lane’s brooch; that one she laid down on the counter just now to have a pin put to

it." It was a handsome sapphire brooch. Katharine admired it very much, but it did not make her discontented with her own selection. "It is not like a common stone at all," she whispered, "I dare say it cost a great deal of money, and if it did, such a one would not suit me. It is the place for hair I want most, and besides, I should never scarcely wear any thing so bright as that."—"You have such an odd taste, Kitty," said her mother. "I declare your new brooch won't be half as smart as your grandmother's garnet. If it wasn't for the old-fashioned setting you had better wear that at the ball after all." Mrs. Ashton's voice was unfortunately loud, and as, in her simplicity, she was not conscious of often saying things which other people should not hear, she seldom took the trouble to lower it. The speech was followed by a very audible giggle from Selina Fowler and Miss Julia Madden, checked by a hush from Miss Madden, and a threatening look from Miss Lane. Katharine heard the latter say, "really those girls are too bad," and Miss Madden went up to her sister and reproved her, but the giggling went on very much as before. Katharine tried not to think about it, but she could not help being annoyed, especially with Selina. She wished her mother would make haste and decide, but Mrs. Ashton could not yet give up her wish for something smart, and insisted upon turning over the brooches again before the choice should be finally made. Katharine sat down patiently on the only unoccupied stool; other people came into the shop and the shopman moved away. "Mrs. Reeves," whispered Mrs. Ashton, putting her head close to her daughter's, and pretending to be examining the same ornament. Katharine slightly moved her head, and saw behind her a lady about six-and-thirty years of age, quiet in manner, very sensible looking, and not at all pretty. She was standing patiently whilst Miss Lane gave some last orders. Katharine rose and offered her seat. Mrs. Reeves did not look at all strong, and besides, she was the clergyman's wife. The offer was not accepted, but the tone in which Mrs. Reeves said, "thank you," was very cordial and kind, and she recognised Mrs. Ashton, and asked how she was, and inquired whether Mr. Ashton had lately been suffering from gout; and then Mrs. Ashton pointed out Katharine as her daughter, and Mrs. Reeves shook hands with her, not at all as Colonel Forbes might have done, but with the pleasant friendly manner of interest and kindheartedness.

She spoke to Miss Lane also, and they talked together of some mutual friend; and the Miss Maddens and Selina Fowler bowed to her, and Mrs. Reeves returned the bow rather distantly.

Katharine observed that the loud talking and giggling ceased when Mrs. Reeves came in; perhaps Selina and her friend were ashamed of it — perhaps they were more occupied in watching what Mrs. Reeves did, for they turned round with their backs to the counter and looked at her, and Katharine felt a little comforted by this; she saw they could be rude to the clergyman's wife as well as to her. "May we go, mother?" she asked, when Mrs. Ashton had completed her inspection; "I don't think I shall see any thing I like better." Mrs. Ashton pointed to a turquoise brooch. "I could not wear that every day, dear mother, and there is no place for hair." — "Well, as you wish, child. Here, Mr. Green, put up this gold brooch, will you?" — "And let me pay for it," said Katharine; "two pounds it is, I think." — "Two pounds, Miss Ashton; shall I put it in a box for you?" — "Thank you, if you will." — "I shall be quite rich besides," she added to her mother, as she took out her purse and laid the money on the counter.

She spoke this without hesitation; for she was quite sure that Mrs. Reeves was not listening to her; and equally sure that, if she did overhear any remark, she would not repeat it and laugh at it. But though Mrs. Reeves might not hear what Katharine said, Katharine could not help hearing what Mrs. Reeves said; for she was talking to Miss Lane and Mr. Green, and telling them of a case of distress in consequence of a fire, for which Mr. Reeves was wishing to raise a general subscription. She was very eager in what she said; and Mr. Green was very civil, and bowed, and hoped such charitable efforts would be crowned with success; and Miss Lane was full of the deepest sympathy, and only trusted that dear Mrs. Reeves would not exert herself too much. Mr. Green, too, was extremely willing — anxious, indeed — to have the subscription papers placed in his shop; and Miss Lane said she should be most happy to give her trifle, when she knew what other people meant to give. But Mrs. Reeves did not appear to advance much farther than this; and Katharine really felt for her, she looked so awkward, and uncomfortable, and disappointed. She lingered, hoping that Mrs. Reeves might speak to her or her mother upon the subject; but nothing was said. Mrs. Reeves only bowed as they moved away. "I shall remember it, though," thought Katharine to herself, "and I can ask Miss Sinclair about it." Five shillings were put aside in her mind instantly: it was but little, but it seemed in a measure to hallow the rest of her riches.

CHAPTER XI.

COLONEL FORBES flattered himself that he was winning golden opinions, as he planned, and consulted, and arranged for the ball; and every day he went to report progress to Mrs. Sinclair; and Jane at last became so interested, that she felt quite an inclination to go, and was half-provoked when all her suggestions as to its being right and proper were met with a decided "my love, it is my wish." She had no one, indeed, to support her, for Mrs. Sinclair was of the same mind with Colonel Forbes, though not, perhaps, from the same cause. Mrs. Sinclair was a little old-fashioned in her notions—perhaps also a little proud; she could understand, she said, the pleasure of a dance given by a landlord to his tenants—there was something of the old feudal spirit in it—a mutual tie of protection and respect; but a ball, when there was no one to guide, and no one to look up to, and every one's will was in a measure his law, was only to be made agreeable by the conventional forms of good society. If the persons who met at the ball had not been accustomed to the same kind of society, their conventional forms must differ, and jarrings and disunions must be the result. Colonel Forbes did not care to dispute the point—one reason was as good as another for him;—he did not choose Jane to go; and so long as he had her mother's support he did not trouble himself as to why it was given. He did wish, though, that Jane would throw herself more into his notions as to the mode of making friends with the townspeople. He had told her about the invitation given to Mr. Ashton, and about meeting Katharine in the street, and offering to shake hands with her; and all Jane said in reply was: "I dare say Katharine did not understand what you meant." "You are making mysteries," he replied; "I can see nothing beyond any person's comprehension in the act of shaking hands."—"Only that, generally speaking, it implies a certain amount of intimacy and friendship," said Jane. "And I intend to be friendly," answered Colonel Forbes.—"But friendliness and friendship are different things," continued Jane, "friendship, you feel, I have no doubt," she added, laughing, "so far that you would not murder poor Katharine; but if she were to leave Rilworth to-morrow, you would not trouble yourself with a second thought about her."—"No reason, dear child, why I should not be kind to her as long as she remains here," was the answer.—"Oh! yes, kind—

of course, kind, if she requires kindness; but the truth is, that I can never get into my head that Katharine requires any thing except"——"What?"——"Respect," said Jane, timidly. Colonel Forbes looked puzzled; but he sat down by Jane, and drew her towards him, and kissed her forehead in a kind of paternal fashion. He was especially fond of her when she was a little afraid of him.——"Such a very odd child!" and he held her hand and stroked it as he would a child's; "and such very odd notions!——How am I to respect people I know nothing about?"——"I think we may respect every one in manner," said Jane;——"poor people and every one. And what I think very often prevents our doing so, is, that they don't respect themselves: but Katharine Ashton does respect herself."——"How?——explain a little more." He was just the very least in the world sharp in his tone. "She respects her own position in life,——that is what I mean. She respects it as much as we do ours, she is not trying to move out of it, and above it."——"Quite right,——she could not if she wished it."——"Then I don't think," continued Jane, "that we can do her any good, or give her any pleasure by behaving to her as if she did wish it. Young-lady politenesses are not, I think, what she wants."——"Shaking hands, and so forth," said Colonel Forbes, laughing; for he liked to hear Jane bring forth her opinions,——she did it so prettily and deferentially, and argument gave her just the animation she required to brighten her soft eyes. "Take care you never shake hands with her yourself, Jane."——"My shaking hands would be a different thing from yours," said Jane. "I should do it because I liked her; and you would do it because"——she stopped;——"I was going to say, because you wished her to like you, but that would not be correct. You don't care in the least for Katharine Ashton's liking or disliking you, but you do care for Mr. Ashton's daughter liking you, because that involves influence with Mr. Ashton himself. Oh, Philip!" It was so very, very rarely that Jane ventured upon the Christian name——Colonel Forbes would have willingly endured a lecture of a very different kind for the pleasure of hearing it.

He could not argue with her any more——he did not at the moment care enough about that subject, about any subject but one: repeating her words in a low tone, he said, earnestly, "Oh, Philip!——that was a very pleasant sound: when shall I be blessed by hearing it hourly?" The crimson colour dyed Jane's cheek. "My mother begged for three months," she said, "and more than two are gone. Shall it be this day three weeks——the

fifteenth?"—there was a long pause,—he turned away as if unable to bear the delay. But the answer came—"The fifteenth, if you will." The words were scarcely audible, and her eyes were dimmed by glistening tears. It was a very painful happiness.

But the day was fixed, and Colonel Forbes' mind was at rest. Uncertainty was worse for him than for most people; his disposition was so imperious, so impatient of opposition. Mrs. Sinclair saw this, and sighed. Jane saw it, and thought how he loved her! The preparations for the wedding were to be very quiet; not so the preparations for the ball. It wanted now but four days, and yet nothing seemed ready. The question of the Duchess's supper was still undecided, but Colonel Forbes had given up insisting upon it. It was left like a good many other things in this world, to take its chance. So, however, could not be left the important arrangements of lights and music, benches and evergreens, about which there had been at first as many varying opinions as there were members of the committee. Some, who like George Andrews, made it a rule to consult the people, had at first opposed every thing which Colonel Forbes suggested, on the principle that the Colonel represented the aristocratic interest, and in a democratic Union Ball no such influence could of course be permitted. The Colonel had been obliged to fight every inch of his way to the attainment of his favourite points—namely, ornamenting the walls simply with evergreens, instead of masses of artificial flowers—having a very good band from the county town, instead of a very bad one from Rilworth,—and lighting the room with wax candles, instead of oil lamps. But he did gain the victory at last, and when every one else was tired out,—and Mr. Lane, the solicitor, had found out that balls were expensive in time as well as money,—and Mr. Henry Madden had taken offence because George Andrews quizzed him,—and Mr. John Price, the banker's son, who had just been taken into partnership with his father, had been made aware that he was considered a greater oracle at the cricket-club than at the committee-room of the "Bear,"—and two or three others, who had never attended at all, except to find fault, had discovered that they were exhausted with their labours, then Colonel Forbes stepped quietly into their place, and with the help of George Andrews, managed every thing his own way. It was very cleverly done. The arrangements had been discussed so often, and the Colonel had so continually deferred to the general opinion, one day, and the next re-opened the same

questions with fresh doubts, that no one could tell where or how they were left, and so each took it for granted they were settled according to his wish. There was not one member of the committee who did not believe that on his judgment and his vote entirely depended the success of the ball,—and neither was there one, except George Andrews, who was at all aware that every individual point which had been discussed in the committee-room had been re-discussed, and re-settled by the will of Colonel Forbes. — “Let them think they have their wish,” said Colonel Forbes one day to Jane, whilst laughing with her over the changes he had taken upon himself to make: “it is much safer, and makes them just as happy as having the wish itself.” George Andrews, indeed, was not to be so deceived, but then Colonel Forbes did not attempt to deceive him. Vulgar and self-opinionated though he was, he was the only individual of the committee who possessed more than a moderate portion of quickness and common sense; and Colonel Forbes had seized upon him, and as he could not work without him, had forced himself to work with him. When the last week before the ball arrived, George Andrews was heartily one with Colonel Forbes, —lured by a good deal of open flattery, a few good-humoured laughs at the expense of his neighbours, a discreet yielding upon points which were not of the least consequence, and above all, a frequent use of the pronouns “us” and “we.”

“What trouble Forbes takes about these people and their ball,” said Lord Marchmont, one day to his father, when Colonel Forbes had been taking luncheon at Rilworth Castle; “who would have given him credit for it?” The Duke smiled, and pointed to the parliamentary list. The Duke was a man of observation. He knew more of Colonel Forbes’ mind than Colonel Forbes himself, for the idea of standing for the borough was as yet only in embryo.

Reports of progress were duly brought to Katharine Ashton by Selina Fowler, for Selina was the dear friend of Matty Andrews, and Matty of course heard every thing from headquarters. Katharine did not disdain the information. She had not quarrelled with Selina because she had been rude, and she did not intend to quarrel. She did not respect Selina sufficiently to be offended at any thing she might do, and she never forgot that it was more than probable she might one day be her sister-in-law. They met as very good friends, and Katharine showed her brooch when she was asked for it, and said it was her father’s present. There was no mystery in the case, and she did not

think it necessary to make any, — and this baffled Selina, and her curiosity and her love of gossip, more than any thing.

Katharine looked forward to the ball with a good deal of pleasurable excitement as it drew near, though she had cared so little about it when it was first talked about. Her father and John took an interest in it — that was one great point; and her mother liked the idea of meeting her friends, and having a pleasant talk; and though Katharine could not conquer her sense of the unfitness of a party which was to include the Duchess of Lowther, and herself, and Martha Dobson, she still allowed that she should like to watch the Duchess, and see how she behaved.

The day before the ball Jane Sinclair came to see her. They had met frequently of late on little matters of business connected with Jane's district, and the first feeling of mutual liking, that remnant of school-days, had increased rapidly. Jane could not help seeing that Katharine was, in taste, though not in cultivation of mind, more congenial to her own ideas of what was superior and right-minded, than many whom she met in society, calling themselves ladies; and Katharine looked upon Jane with as much of romantic admiration as was compatible with her natural character. Still the intercourse between them was chiefly matter-of-fact: they talked about the poor and the parish, and a little of Katharine's family; but Jane often lingered in the back parlour longer than was absolutely necessary, and Katharine sometimes found herself saying things to Miss Sinclair which she did not think any one else would have understood. Katharine was wishing to see Jane now to speak to her about the subscription for the family who had suffered from the fire. She waited some time to see what her father would give; but Mr. Ashton would not allow his name to be put down for more than half a crown, because Mr. Madden did not offer more. Katharine could not therefore give her donation openly, but she thought that Jane would take it to Mrs. Reeves for her, and that would do as well.

There was a change in Jane since last they met: Katharine noticed it, or rather felt it. Her visit was very short, and she was more shy, more veiled, as it were, and her words were not uttered as freely: they seemed less the natural expression of her thoughts. There was no change in kindness, but Jane was no longer living in any degree in Katharine's world, and Katharine might have felt the difference and been pained at it, but that as they parted, Jane stood for a second holding her hand, and blushing deeply said: "Katharine, I am to be married on the fifteenth."

—“Married! Oh, Miss Sinclair, I wish you such happiness!” Katharine’s voice was nearly choked, and her hand trembled with affectionate eagerness. Jane returned the warm pressure more gently, yet with even greater tenderness. “Thank you. I was sure you would feel with me. Please not to mention it to any one.” They parted. Jane to watch for Colonel Forbes, and count the minutes till the hour of his promised visit. Katharine to occupy herself till tea time, in putting the finishing touches to her mother’s cap. “Married,” she thought to herself, as she took up her needle and thread, and mechanically twisted the ribbon and gauze into its proper form. “How odd it will be! I wish I liked Colonel Forbes better. I wish I was sure he was going to make her happy;—and I shall not see any thing more of her then!” That was the worst thought of all at the moment. Katharine did not know before how fond she was of Jane. Marriage would be a great separation. Jane would indeed live at Maplestead, and be often at Rilworth, but the wife of Colonel Forbes could never be to her what the simple, unassuming Jane Sinclair had been. All that “auld lang syne” sympathy, dating from school-days, would be swept away in the new ties which she was about to form: and again Katharine said to herself: “I wish I could be sure she was going to be happy.” From Jane’s marriage Katharine wandered off to marriage in general,—to her own—if such a thing could be; she could not help smiling to herself at the idea, the possibility,—it seemed so—almost absurd. Whom could she ever find to care for as well as her father, and mother, and John? And if she did care for “any one,”—how could she suppose that “any one” would ever care for her? And if she did care, it would be very terrible to go away from home,—it must be some one so very unlike any person she had ever seen, who would make up to her for the loss of home. No, she did not think that marriage was in her way. The girls at school used to tell her so. They used to prophesy that Selly would have a great many offers, but they always said to her that she was sure to die an old maid; and Katharine had imbibed a kind of faith in the prediction,—so far at least that she was never troubled with fears lest the persons she met should fall in love with her,—a fear which she knew was continually haunting the mind of Selina.

But then, if she did not marry, what should she do all her life? Live with her father and mother? but there must come a time of separation. Live with John? No,—if Selina Fowler did not come in the way, some one else would. Live alone? like Miss Cookson, the stout old lady, whose father had been the chief

linendraper in the place, and who now inhabited the little white house just beyond the turnpike, on the Maplestead Road. Katharine's heart misgave her. Miss Cookson had plenty to eat, plenty to drink, plenty of acquaintances, no friends, two hundred a year, and nothing to do. She could not wish to be an old maid like Miss Cookson. What then could she be? what ought she to be?

That was a deep question; too deep for Katharine, too deep for many much older and wiser persons. It was like Christian's "Slough of Despond;" and Katharine felt herself sinking into it. Happy for her that the appearance of the servant and the tea broke in upon her meditations.

CHAPTER XII.

KATHARINE had quite forgotten the Slough of Despond when she entered the long room at the "Bear," on the evening of the long-expected ball. She felt very timid, very awkward, but extremely inclined to be amused and happy. They went early; Mrs. Ashton liked, she said, to be sure of good seats, and there would be enough to do in watching people as they came in. So, almost before the candles were lighted, and more than a quarter of an hour before the musicians assembled in the gallery, Mrs. Ashton and Katharine took their seats on the upper benches, between the fire-place and the door; not at the top of the room, that would have been in the way of the Duchess and her friends. "Colonel Forbes had been there only five minutes before," George Andrews told them, as he met them at the door, radiant in a purple satin waistcoat, and very shining shoes, "but he was gone to the 'Bear' to dress; he would be back as soon as possible, for he was to receive the Duchess, and she was to arrive punctually at eight." Mrs. Ashton was much interested by the information, and considered Mr. George most kindly communicative. She did not think, as Katharine did, that he talked to them only because there was no one of more importance present, and talk he must to somebody. "I assure you, Mrs. Ashton, we have worked uncommonly hard," he continued: "you wouldn't know this to be the same room in which the great anti-corn law meeting was held last year, now, would you? Matty, my sister, and the two Maddens, the girls I mean—Harry Madden and I are not on terms exactly,—brought a whole heap of made-up roses to put over the mantelpiece, but

we felt it would be better not ; it would destroy the tastefulness. It is simple, now, you see, Miss Katharine, — quite simple, like your dress, which you must allow me to say is remarkably pretty.” He turned away to welcome a new arrival, and did not see Katharine’s affronted face. She never liked George Andrews, under any circumstances ; as steward of a ball she thought him actually detestable in his impertinence.

The room began to fill. Amongst the earliest who came were Selina Fowler and her mother, and two cousins from the country, and a young ensign from the regiment stationed at the county town, who had been dining with them. Selina looked handsome ; her blue silk dress was very pretty, and very well made, and her long black ringlets were glossy and neatly arranged. Katharine wished she could have cut off some streaming ribbons depending from the dress, and tried the effect of a single white rose, instead of a wreath of pink ones ; but that might be her own want of knowledge of the fashion. People, she was aware, did wear very odd colours together, and pink and blue might be quite right. She took pleasure in seeing Selina, and quite forgot any past offences ; indeed they were so common that they were not worth remembering. “ Selly has brought one partner with her, and she is sure of John and George Andrews, so there will be three dances for her, mother,” she said : “ how she will enjoy it ! But do look ! there is Martha Dobson, I declare, and old Mr. Dobson, — doesn’t he look pleased ? Do let us go across and speak to him : don’t you see him admiring the candles and the laurels ? ” — “ We shall lose our places if we move,” said Mrs. Ashton ; “ people are coming in so fast. See, there is Henry Madden, — isn’t it, Kate ? I wonder what he and George Andrews are cool about ? And who is that young lady in white near him ? Miss Sophy Lane, isn’t it ? I did not know she was old enough to come out to a ball. And next to her must be Mrs. Hugh Coke, of Littlefield. She is going up to the top of the room, you see. I suppose she means to get near the Duchess. That is a very odd cap of hers, Kitty, isn’t it ? I am glad you did not make mine like it.” — “ I wish they would begin dancing,” said Katharine ; “ I should so like to see them.” — “ And to dance yourself, too, child,” observed Mrs. Ashton ; “ your father said he should come in as soon as ever he could, hoping to see you well at it.” — “ I don’t know whom I am to dance with,” said Katharine, “ and I shall be very much afraid of trying ; but I shall be sure to enjoy seeing it all. Do, mother, just get Martha Dobson to come and sit by us ; she looks so lonely out there by herself, and old Mr. Dobson is away at the other end,

talking to Mr. Lane's clerk." Mrs. Ashton was still afraid to move herself, fearing to lose the seats, but she sent Katharine across the room to give the invitation, promising to take care of her seat for her. So Katharine made her way to the doorway, but was there stopped by a considerable commotion, caused by no less an event than the arrival of the Duchess of Lowther and her party. The press was very unpleasant, for every one moved back, to make way, and Katharine's dress was crumpled unmercifully. She did not think of that, however, being amused to stand behind the door and watch what went on. "That's Colonel Forbes," she heard whispered by some one behind her. "He is a steward; you may know him by the purple bow at his button-hole; all the stewards have purple bows."—"Oh, then, there's another behind."—"Yes, Mr. Andrews,—Mr. George Andrews, son of the rich auctioneer."—"And Mr. Lane? he can't be a steward, he is too old!"—"Yes, but he is. Stand back; here they come." Some people pretended not to look;—they were the county people at the upper end, who said they had seen the Duchess of Lowther hundreds of times, and why should they look at her now? Katharine had seen her very often too; yet she did like to see her again, for it was a new view of a familiar object; and she was curious to see the party who accompanied her. Lady Marchmont, the celebrated beauty, and Lady Julia and Lady Mary Ferrers, the Duchess's two daughters, and several other unknown but no doubt equally distinguished individuals, who were some young, some old, some handsome, some ugly, but all rather wonderful to Katharine, because they were so like every one else. The Duchess herself was remarkable chiefly for her good-humoured expression of face, and her love of talking. She had been handsome, and she dressed particularly well, and had a certain kindly dignity of manner, from having been accustomed all her life to confer rather than receive favours, all of which tended to create a favourable impression. Katharine looked at her with pleasure, but the person she liked best to see was Colonel Forbes. He was in the room before the Duchess's arrival, and went forward to meet her, and offer his arm, and they walked to the top of the ball-room together. He looked so very refined, so entirely a gentleman, Katharine forgot Martha Dobson, and thought of Miss Sinclair, and wished she had been there to see him.

"If he is as good as he is good-looking, there will be no fear," she said to herself.

"Miss Ashton, they are going to dance, now the Duchess is come. Would you try the country dance with me?" It was

Charles Ronaldson speaking,—over her shoulder, because he had not the courage to make the request to her face. Katharine was a little frightened,—but a good deal pleased. She had not till then quite made up her mind to attempt dancing at all: seeing so many strangers had at first made her feel it would be impossible; but now that she was more accustomed to them, she had a hope that the very fact of the numbers would cause her mistakes to pass unnoticed. “I should like to try very much,” she said, “but I don’t know much about it, so please let us get quite at the bottom.”

There was great confusion in the room—stewards with purple bows rushing about amongst crowds of perplexed couples, who could not possibly be made to understand that in a country dance gentlemen and ladies must stand opposite to each other; a few individuals more learned and more adventurous making their way to the upper end of the room, and resolutely placing themselves in front of some of the Duchess of Lowther’s friends: scornful looks in consequence on one side, and half-suppressed triumphant smiles on the other;—a good deal of pressing and squeezing,—a muttered apology,—a stiff bow,—fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts, pressing in upon the ranks, and only kept back by the peremptory commands of Mr. George Andrews, and the more softened, but not less imperious entreaties, of Colonel Forbes;—such were the preparations for the country dance! Katharine kept her arm within her companion’s as long as she possibly could, for she was so bewildered that she did not remember what the dance was like, but the fact dawned upon her when she saw Martha Dobson separated from her partner, a clumsy-looking country boy, and vainly peering for him with her near-sighted eyes, as he stood opposite to her. Katharine turned to Charles, and begged him to keep close to that poor boy and help him, and she would help Martha. “I suspect we know more than they do,” she said; “at any rate, we will watch and learn something before it comes to our turn.”—“Now Martha,” she added, addressing the frightened girl,—“we will just go wrong together, and then nobody can scold us. I don’t know any thing about it, scarcely, but I mean to learn. See, they are just beginning.”

Yes, but not Selina Fowler and George Andrews, as Katharine in her simplicity had expected. Selina was standing not far from herself, looking much out of humour, and her partner was the young ensign; and it was Lady Marchmont who opened the ball, with Colonel Forbes. Katharine was very much amused then; the music was so inspiring, the scene so very pretty, and she thought it would be extremely nice to get to the top, and go down

the middle, and she could scarcely keep her feet still, they seemed so involuntarily to keep time to the music. Every now and then she caught a glimpse of her mother through the gazing crowd, and Mrs. Ashton's pleased smile was as exhilarating to her as the music. When it came to her part to turn in the dance, however, she forgot what she was to do, and making a great blunder, blushed and begged pardon, and to make amends, helped Martha Dobson with such excellent instruction, that in some wonderful way—how, Martha never knew—she actually went through the trial of "hands across," and came back to her place in safety. Louder and more gladdening sounded the music, faster and faster down came the dancers. Katharine was so eager not to make mistakes that she did not notice with whom she danced, and cared no more for Lord Marchmont and his brothers and the great people of the county, than she would for her brother John. Dancing was her business just then, and she set herself to it with straightforward earnestness, as she would to any other business. George Andrews, she found, was not dancing, he was moving up and down behind the ranks, urging every one to "keep up, keep up," not to leave blank spaces, and cause confusion. Katharine saw that there were spaces, that the numbers in the dance were fewer; she did not see the reason, till she observed Lady Marchmont sitting down on a bench by the door, and Colonel Forbes standing by her talking to her. They then had left the dance, so had Lady Julia Ferrers, so had her sister, so had a great many others of their party. She heard some one near her say: "That's too bad; if they have had their pleasure, why shouldn't they wait?" and many were the disappointed angry looks which were cast at them. "You are not going to sit down," said George Andrews, coming up to Selina Fowler, when she had danced to the end; "you must not, it is against the rules."—"Not against my rules," was Selina's reply, and with a toss of the head, she left her place and sat down. Two or three others followed her example; the spirit of the dancers was departing;—Katharine stood at the top, and did not quite know whether it was worth while to go on. Colonel Forbes saw there was a pause, gave the signal to the musicians,—and the country dance was over.

Disappointment the first,—a great disappointment to Katharine, —but she bore it very patiently. Not so many others. "It was the grandee airs," they said, which they disliked, and other folks imitating them; but they would have their revenge; they would have a country dance before the evening was over, and all to themselves, and three times up and down they would go if they

chose it. A decided party was formed; all who had left the country dance were considered to be, as it was said, apeing the grandees; and when a quadrille was proposed, no one else would go into the same set with them. Katharine would not venture upon a quadrille, though Charles Ronaldson asked her, and said they had really not danced at all. She sat down by her mother, and watched the forming of the quadrilles. "Do look, mother," she said, "there are Selly and Henry Madden wanting a place; where will they go?"—"Into that second set, I suppose," said Mrs. Ashton. "There is no one standing opposite to that young lady in the white silk." The young lady in white silk was a cousin of Lady Marchmont's. She and her partner were looking round for a *vis-à-vis*. Selina and young Madden were just coming up. It was impossible not to see them. The young lady put up her eye-glass, glanced round the quadrille, said quite loudly, "We have no *vis-à-vis*," and quietly retired. The dancing began, and Selina was obliged to sit down. "Now that's what I call rude," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton. "Very rude," said Katharine; "but if I were Selly I would not have put myself in the way of it. She might have seen they were not any of them her set."—"But one set is as good as another to-night," said Mrs. Ashton; "people were all to dance together, I thought."—"Yes, dance with the people who dance like them," replied Katharine; "that is what they are doing. Mother, is not Lady Marchmont beautiful, and isn't it pleasant to see her move about in that sliding way!" "She does not dance half as merrily as you, Kate," replied her mother. "You went through that twisty figure in the country dance as if you had been at it all your life. How I wish your father could have seen you."—"Ah, but mother, that was dancing for myself. Lady Marchmont's dancing is for other people. I could watch her all night;" and Katharine bent forward, that her view might not be obstructed by a venerable old lady who sat next her, and followed every movement of the graceful Lady Marchmont with the most eager delight.

Katharine's was one of the few faces on which a hearty smile of pleasure was to be seen. The feeling in the room generally was uncomfortable. Selina Fowler was not the only person aggrieved. Miss Lane found herself in the third set, when she wished to be in the second; Miss Madden fancied that Lady Julia Ferrers had cut her; Miss Andrews felt especially angry that, as the sister of a steward, she had not been introduced to the Duchess. Some of the county people were heard making remarks upon Miss Julia Madden's style of dancing; and the unfortunate

"grandeess,"—from the good-natured Duchess, wishing to be kind, but not in the least knowing how to begin, to the silly girl who did not choose to be *vis-à-vis* to Selina Fowler—were all included in one term—"airified."

Colonel Forbes, with the quick instinct of a seeker of popularity, felt, almost before he saw, what was amiss. "We are keeping aloof too much," he said to the Duchess: "it will not do to have the sets distinct. Can your Grace persuade Lord Marchmont to play the agreeable?" The Duchess, only too delighted to be spared the responsibility of thought, appealed to her son: "Marchmont, there is Miss Lane,—do you see her?—the young lady in yellow: go and ask Miss Lane for the next quadrille;—you really must—it will be civil.—And Walter,"—she beckoned to another son—"Colonel Forbes, be so good as to find Walter a partner?—Go and talk your best, my dear boy; don't be shy, there is nothing to be shy about.—What else can I do, Colonel Forbes?—only tell me?—what can I do?—Must I walk up and down and talk to them?—Ah! what a comfort!—here are the officers!" A great comfort indeed, not only for the Duchess, but for the whole room. Officers are amphibious animals,—they can live in all elements. Colonel Forbes seized on the major and the captain for Miss Lane and Miss Madden, introduced a lieutenant to one young lady, an ensign to another; then called for a polka; and, as the whirling dance began, returned to the Duchess, to congratulate both her and himself that the success of the ball was secure.

Most mistaken man! The polka once begun, when was it to end? Martha Dobson looked on in despair—Katharine in something much more akin to disgust; but the polka-dancers—as indefatigable, though by no means as elegant, as the dancing Dervishes—seemed to have made it a principle to continue till they had exhausted their own breath, and the patience of their friends. In utter weariness of the fatigue of standing still, some who had never seen the dance before ventured to try it. To cling like drowning wretches to each other—the lady's head apparently resting upon her partner's shoulder for support—and then to make a hopping rush, seemed all that was required; and, brave as unpractised aeronauts, they set off. A collision—a stumble—the interruption of the dance,—unpleasant words followed; but what did that signify in a polka?—On and on again, getting more excited, more rapid, more in the way! The confusion was bewildering. Lady Marchmont drew back, and, with a haughty air, declared that she could venture upon it no

more—the romping was intolerable. Colonel Forbes was annoyed at her annoyance, and would have put an end to the dance, but there was no opportunity. The Duchess, he saw, was as uncomfortable as her daughter-in-law. She talked of retiring; that would have been the most dire offence, and Colonel Forbes petitioned earnestly for a little forbearance—a little patience. “Supper should be prepared for her Grace alone if that would please her;” but, as he said the words, he felt that he was committing a blunder. The Duchess consented to stay; but she could not allow her daughters to dance any more; or, if they did, it must, she said, be entirely with their own party. Mixtures would not do. Then there was no more hope of another and a more successful country-dance. Poor Colonel Forbes! he felt already all that was being said, and would be said; he had but one consolation—that Jane was not present. “Kate,” said Mr. Ashton—who had made his appearance in the ball-room just as the polka began, and had watched the proceedings for some time in ominous silence—“Kate, that dance may do very well for fine ladies and gentlemen, but, mind me, it won’t do for you.” —“No father, I should never wish it.”

The polka ended at last. Panting ladies, with heated complexions and disordered hair, threw themselves upon the nearest seats, and equally panting gentlemen stood by them, offering to fetch lemonade. Selina Flower was amongst them—she had recovered her equanimity; but thanks to Colonel Forbes, not to George Andrews. Colonel Forbes had introduced her to an officer—George Andrews had entirely neglected her: she, who had considered herself engaged to open the ball with him, had been utterly put aside! The consequences were of no importance to Mr. George Andrews, who had made a foolish speech without in the least intending to act upon it; and who, though he amused himself with talking to Miss Selina Fowler when he had nothing else to do, never bestowed a serious thought upon her,—but they were of great importance to John Ashton. “Miss Selly is making up with John, after all,” said Mr. Ashton, as he saw them stand up together for a quadrille; “I shouldn’t have thought that would have been her line to-night; but he’s a fine looking young fellow, I must say that for him. They make a handsome couple, don’t they, wife?—don’t they, Ronaldson?” he added, turning to Charles, who had just joined them. “Selly is in a pet with George Andrews,” said Katharine, “she told me that just now; she always makes up to John when she wishes to spite any one.” —“That is not said like you, Kitty,” observed Mr. Ashton, “it

is not what I call kind ; but somehow I don't think you ever are quite kind to John and Miss Selly." — "I don't think I am, father ; but I cannot help seeing what is before my eyes, and if I were John I could not trust a girl that was one thing to me one day and another the next. I never could like any one that changed." — "Are you certain to like one that never changed?" asked Charles Ronaldson. His voice sounded so deep and strange that it seemed like that of another person, and Katharine turned round to look at him ; but he was just the same as usual in manner and appearance, — just as quiet and shy, yet with that keen, quick glance which seemed to take in every thing that was going on, and comment upon and draw inferences from it in the same moment. Katharine laughed gaily in reply to his question, and said she would not undertake to promise quite so much as that ; but it would certainly be a great point in a person's favour. A bright gleam, the sunshine of the mind, crossed Charles Ronaldson's face ; it was very soon gone, however, and, though still standing by Katharine's side, he relapsed into silence. The quadrille was ended, and another country dance was proposed, and every one was seeking or claiming partners. Katharine, to her extreme surprise, was accosted by Colonel Forbes, and, before she was at all aware of what was intended, introduced to a stranger, an officer, and carried away into the crowd, and placed nearly at the top of the dance. Most entirely out of her proper position, she felt it to be. Where were Lady Marchmont, Lady Julia Ferrers, Lady Mary, Mrs. Hugh Coke, and a great many others of the same caste ? surely some one ought to take her place ! Colonel Forbes clapped his hands impatiently for the musicians to begin. Katharine had no more time given her for wondering. Her part would come next, and she must not put every one out by blundering ; and merrily she moved in the dance, merrily she went "down the middle and up again," thinking a country dance one of the pleasantest things in the world ; and brightly she smiled at her father, when she reached the bottom, as he came up to her and patted her on the shoulder, and whispered — "Well done, my little Kate, you'll tire them all out after all." But there was no one else smiling, no one at least that she could see ; all were whispering, and glancing, and muttering, with clouded brows and scornful lips, and gazing at the upper end of the room, upon the empty seats, where ought to have been seen the Duchess of Lowther and her friends. In the confusion of the dance they had slipped away, as they had hoped, unperceived, and now a rumour had reached the ball-room that the Duchess was taking her private refreshment,

and when she was gone supper would be ready for every one else. It was in vain for Colonel Forbes to go from one to the other with civil bows and smooth words, to suggest that it was of no consequence to them what the Duchess did, that she was in delicate health and disliked late hours, that the ball was but just begun, and they must keep it up bravely till the morning; in vain also that he singled out disconsolate girls who had not danced before, and promised to find them partners for the next dance; in vain that he enlisted his personal friends into his service, and introduced them to all whom he thought likely to take offence;—the deed was done—the spirit of exclusiveness had entered, and the spirit of the ball was gone. As the Duchess did not think it worth while to stay to supper, so did not the county people; as the county people did not, so did not the more important of the townspeople. The room thinned rapidly. When the Duchess's carriage drove off, Colonel Forbes in despair ordered supper; but there was no one to take the lead, no one to give tone or order to the proceedings,—it was one universal rush and press, and seizing upon beef and ham, and jellies, and calling for wine and soda-water; and there was a great hubbub in the supper-room, and a good deal of complaining of want of accommodation, and sharp witticisms upon the grandes, and quotations of proverbs, such as “the more the merrier,” “the fewer the better cheer,” “rather have your room than your company,” “more missed than wanted,” &c.; from all which it was evident that speeches and drinking healths would be quite out of place, and that any allusions to unity and sympathy and the happy mingling of all classes, would be received with decided disapprobation. So Mr. George Andrews was unwillingly persuaded to give up his intention of proposing the health of the Duchess of Lowther in a neat speech, and Colonel Forbes relinquished his intention of replying to it in a politic one. Even the health of the stewards it was felt would be a dangerous subject, and still more dangerous would be the discussion of exciting topics whilst the gentlemen lingered at the supper table. The different parties were therefore hurried back to the ball-room before they had time to do much more than taste what was set before them, utterly to the discomfiture of the elderly people, who cared nothing for the dancing but much for the supper, and were heard to say, that to be called upon to pay five shillings for a ham sandwich and a scrap of jelly, was little else than being cheated.

There was dancing after supper, but not pleasant dancing, not at least to Katharine's feelings. The restraint of the first part

of the evening was much more to her taste than the licence of the latter part. If it could ever be amusing to see people behave foolishly and rudely, she might have smiled to see the feud breaking out between George Andrews and Henry Madden; George taking upon himself to be the great man of the evening, to give orders and find fault, and Henry Madden venting contemptuous sneers and open witticisms. She might have been amused also to watch Miss Lane's over-acted dignity, and Miss Madden's quiet flirtations, and Selina Fowler's noisy ones; but though Katharine's mind was not philosophical, it was what is far better, simply religious; and the instinct of right feeling told her before she could reason, that all these things, common though they were, and by many scarcely deemed worthy of serious reproof, were in themselves evil.

"We had better go, had we not, dear mother?" she said, joining her parents at the conclusion of a country dance, in which Colonel Forbes himself had condescended to be her partner. "It is getting late, and I am sure you must be tired." — "Not tired if you are not, Kate," said Mrs. Ashton, trying to conceal a yawn. "I dare say you would like to stay for the chance of another dance with the Colonel." — "There is no chance of that mother," replied Katharine laughing; "I have had my turn; don't you see he is going his round? Matty Andrews and Selly have been laying wagers," she added, "as to whom he will ask next. He takes us all in right order, according to rank, and Matty nearly quarrelled with Selina, because Selly said it was quite right he should dance with the Maddens before her." — "Sharp man!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton. "He reckons each dance as a vote; but he won't take us in quite so easily as that. Come Kate, are you ready?" — Katharine took one arm, Mrs. Ashton the other. There were but few good-byes to be said; only a parting shake of the hand with Charlie Ronaldson, and rather a distant bow to Mrs. Fowler and some friends near her, who with exemplary patience were waiting till their daughters should be tired of a Scotch reel which had just begun. Colonel Forbes met them at the door. — "Going! Mrs. Ashton, it is quite early; you are rather hard upon your daughter; Miss Ashton, I hope you have enjoyed yourself." — "Very much indeed, thank you, sir." — "And thank you for dancing with her," added Mrs. Ashton. She could not help thanking him, in spite of Mr. Ashton's hints about policy; it did seem very kind. They were both genuine speeches of hearty good-will; and when Colonel

Forbes, wearied and disgusted, went home to meditate upon the success of the Union Ball, they were almost the only words which recurred to him with any thing like real satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AND you really mean to ask Miss Selly to be your wife, John?" said Mr. Ashton, not in the most conciliatory tone of voice, as they sat round the fire after supper the week following the ball.—"Why, yes, father, if you have no objection; she has made up to me more of late, and I don't think now she'll say no."—"Humph! and where do you mean to live, and what do you mean to do for bread and cheese?"—"Get a little help from you, father, I hope," replied John, "and stock that farm of Colonel Forbes', which he says he will let me have."—"More fool he," replied Mr. Ashton, "I thought he held back and said he did not like to trust his land to a man who knew nothing about farming."—"He knows better than that now," replied John; "it's not his cue to affront us town-folks, now that there is to be a dissolution of Parliament."—"Oh! that's the way the wind blows," exclaimed Mr. Ashton; "but we must have a little more talk about this matter, John, my good fellow; I can't have you running your head blindfold against a stone wall.—Farming is not your line and the shop is. Stick to the shop and marry Miss Selly if you will, though I think you might go further and not run any risk of faring worse; but don't go and bury your money in a ploughed field, and fancy it's all of a sudden to come up wheat." John looked very disconcerted. "Don't take on, John," said his mother encouragingly; "you will bring Selly round to your way of thinking about the shop easier than you fancy. Kate, you must use your influence." Katharine's needle moved very fast; she did not once look up. "Katharine is quite against me," said John; "she has been so especially ever since the ball."—"Since the ball!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, "what has the ball to do with the matter?"—"It is not only since the ball," observed Katharine, still working diligently, "but I did see things then which made me think more about it."—"About what?" asked John. "I do believe, Kitty, there has been a feud between you and Selina ever since the days when you went to Miss Richardson's."—"I hope not, John dear," replied Katharine, with a good-humoured smile, "that would be a very old quarrel, and besides, I don't recollect that we ever had any feuds there."—

"No!" observed Mr. Ashton; "Miss Richardson always said you were such a girl for being a makepeace; but what is the mischief about the ball, Kitty?"—"Only that I saw more of Selly's ways that evening," replied Katharine, "and they did not strike me as being nice."—"She had more partners than you had," observed John, "if that is what you mean."—"She knows more people, and she is much better looking than I am," answered Katharine; "but I don't want to say any thing against her; and I had rather not give any opinion," she added, looking round as if addressing them all; "the least said the soonest mended, and if Selly Fowler is to be my sister-in-law (the words came out sorely against her will) I shall like her for John's sake, and try all I can to make her happy." Faster than before went Katharine's needle, and her head was bent down so low that no one saw the large tear which fell upon her work. "I suppose we may thank the ball for it all," observed Mrs. Ashton. "If it hadn't been for George Andrews going off then as he did, I don't in my heart think, John, that Selly would ever really have favoured you."—"I thought she was going to favour that young flashing ensign," said Mr. Ashton; "what a chatter and a noise they did keep up together; she mustn't do that, John, when she is your wife."—"She won't want to do it," replied John; "it is only her high spirits; when people are married they get sobered."—"Do they?" asked Katharine quickly, and not quite gently. "Yes, Kitty, they do get sobered," repeated John; "do you think my mother was what she is now before she married, and when she was as young as Selina?"—"I think she always knew how to be modest and well behaved," replied Katharine, rather pointedly. "Mother, dear," she added, kissing her, "did you ever make people turn round to look at you because you talked and laughed so loud?" The words were no sooner uttered than repented—Katharine had broken an inward resolution. Mrs. Ashton replied, "I won't answer for what I was, Kitty; I know I was a very idle lassie."—"But I will answer for it," interrupted Mr. Ashton; "she would never have been my wife if she had. I hate such noisy, giggling misses; but they are all much of a muchness in these days. Matty Andrews, and the Maddens, and even that little Miss Lane, were all of a piece I thought that night. I declare I liked much better to see Martha Dobson ploughing along like a good, honest, quiet, cart horse."—"So did I, father," observed Katharine laughing, "and I think if they had all been like Martha, the Duchess wouldn't have gone off in the way she did. Miss Sinclair said as much to me yesterday."—"Miss Sinclair has no right to speak

about the matter," observed John, "she was too proud to be there. People can't expect court ways in a country place."—"But they can expect quiet, good ways," replied Katharine, "and that is what I did not see at the ball; only in a few, that is."—"Just the grandees," observed John scornfully.—"Not all the grandees," replied Katharine. "They were quiet enough, most of them; but I did not think they were all well mannered; that young lady, for instance, who turned off because she would not let Selly dance opposite to her. But what I mean is no matter of being a grandee or not a grandee, it's something that every one may be who chooses—something which would prevent people from talking loudly to be noticed, because they would feel that it was better not be noticed."—"Something which you are yourself, Kitty," observed Mr. Ashton, patting her head as he rose and stood with his back to the fire. "I did not see a better behaved girl in the room." Katharine blushed and smiled with honest undisguised pleasure. "I should be very bad if I was not well behaved, father," she said, "when I have lived all my life with you and my mother; and I dare say Selly and the rest would think as I do if they had ever been taught the same; so John, dear," she added, turning to her brother, "I dare say when Selly and you are married, and she comes to live among us, we shall learn to think more alike."—"John won't bring her here," observed Mr. Ashton shortly, "there's the shop."—"John is not really ashamed of the shop I am sure," said Katharine kindly, as she laid her hand on her brother's arm. "It is only just now, because of Selly's fancy."—"The shop has done us a great deal of good, that's certain," observed Mrs. Ashton. "I don't know what in the world we should have been without it. I am sure when I married your father, and we set up housekeeping in the corner house in Cork Street, and he was looking about for something to do with the five hundred pounds his uncle left him, I never thought we should have been as well to do in life as we are now. There is a great deal to be thankful for in the shop."—"A great deal, indeed," repeated Katharine very earnestly. John was silent. "It's work, and amusement, and profit, and respectability," continued Katharine. "Umph," ejaculated John in a doubtful tone. "Yes, respectability, John, dear; twenty thousand times more respectability than setting up to be what one is not, and fussing to put oneself out of one's proper place." And as John still looked disinclined to speak, she added, "that was what I felt at the ball the other night, and it was the only thing I did not like in being there. It is much more respectable to my mind

to be here snug with you, and my father and mother, dressed in my week-day gown, than to be walking about in white muslin, and dancing with that officer and with Colonel Forbes. Isn't it so father?" and she fixed her dark intelligent eyes eagerly upon her father. "Would not you like me better to be always as I am now, than always as I was then?"—"I always like you best, child, as you are at the minute," answered Mr. Ashton, stooping down and kissing her forehead. "Isn't it time for you to be going to bed?" That was a signal that Mr. Ashton wished to have a little private conversation with his son; and Mrs. Ashton and Katharine took the hint, and, folding up their work, went up stairs.

Katharine was not immediately told, in direct words, the result of the midnight conference,—for it did last till past midnight,—but she read in John's triumphant looks, and her father's thoughtful ones, the next morning. John had gained his point; gained it at least so far that his father had consented to his trying the farm, and had agreed to advance some money to stock it. The plan was to be tried for a twelvemonth. If it did not succeed, Mr. Ashton pleased himself with thinking that no great harm would be done, the stock might be sold again, and John might return to the shop cured of his folly. Perhaps Mr. Ashton might have been the less easily won over to his son's views, but for an inborn fancy, never yet indulged, for trying his own skill in farming. He himself was a farmer's son, and part of his youth had been spent in farming occupations. The early predilection for the country had never quite left him, and although now he would have missed the town and the excitement of his shop, with the customers, and orders, and letters, and the importance attached to them, he had no objection to the idea of a pleasant holiday occasionally at his son's home. As regarded his intended daughter-in-law, however he might criticise her, he did not seriously object to her. He was flattered because she was admired; and she was just enough above him in position to make him lenient to her follies. Besides, she was not Katharine,—not his daughter. Whatever she said or did, it was John's business, not his. He was deficient in that quick instinct which gave Katharine a clue to the working of character upon future events. He could see great things, and reason upon them; but he was blind to little things. And yet upon little things the fate, not only of Mr. Ashton's family, but of the whole world must depend: since great things are but the conglomeration of small ones.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE marriage then was settled. Katharine felt there was scarcely a shadow of hope left, though John had not yet made his offer. Mr. Fowler was a needy man, Mr. Ashton comparatively a rich one; the balance in that, the most essential consideration in the eyes of both, would be entirely in John's favour. Mrs. Fowler would not dare to oppose her husband, and was besides by no means likely to be indifferent to the worldly gain; and for Selina herself, Katharine could not but believe that the *éclat* of a wedding, the new name, the congratulations, the presents, the idea of an independent country home, and affluence, if not wealth, in the distance; to say nothing of the satisfaction of showing Mr. George Andrews that if he did not think her worthy of attention, some one else did, would be quite sufficient to outweigh the prejudice against the shop; the only real obstacle in Selina's mind, and one to which John was most willing to yield. As regarded affection, Katharine felt herself uncharitable, but she could not honestly find it in her heart to give Selina credit for much towards any one but herself. She and John had known each other from infancy; there were the early associations, therefore, to unite their sympathies. They agreed in liking fine houses, and fine dress, and fine people; they had the same distaste for regular employment, the same love of spending money: so far there would be no opposition in their lives; but unity in such things was but an insecure foundation for happiness; and no wonder that Katharine's heart beat faintly and rapidly, as she sat at work in the parlour late in the afternoon, listening for her brother's footsteps on his return from his eventful visit to Mr. Fowler. For John deserved a better fate, — deserved it at least if he had chosen to seek it. He had his father's sense of honour, his mother's kindness of heart, his sister's candour and openness of disposition; his faults in a great measure were the result of bad education in childhood. "John is so high spirited, no one can manage him," said Mr. Ashton, proudly, when he was five years old; and John heard the opinion, and thought it something very grand, and acted upon it; and at ten years of age he was pronounced a noble boy, but a terrible pickle; and at fifteen he was intolerably idle, but there was a great deal of good in him; and at three-and-twenty he was a good-hearted fellow, not fit for business, but a pleasant

companion, and a great favourite with every one. There was nothing vicious in him. Katharine had consoled herself again and again with this thought, when his follies had especially pained her. If he could but fall into good hands, a great deal might be made of him. She had always looked forward to his marriage as the turning point in his life; that which would decide the moral ascent or descent. She overlooked the fact, that as men sow so they are to reap; that an idle, thoughtless youth will lead to an idle, thoughtless marriage. John's choice of Selina Fowler was but another form of the same careless self-indulgent temper which had made him as a child play when he ought to have been learning his lessons, and as a young man waste his time with companions far worse disposed than himself, when he ought to have been devoting himself to his father's business.

Five times had Katharine put down her work and gone to the door, thinking she heard John's step in the passage, and at last, even when the house-bell rang, she did the same mechanically. She heard the question whether Miss Ashton was at home, without exactly understanding from whom it proceeded, though it was a voice which she knew perfectly, and which at any other time would have given her unfeigned satisfaction.—“Here's Miss Sinclair come to see you, Miss Ashton,” said Susan, following her as she retreated into the parlour; “she says she won't disturb you as you are busy.”—“Busy! no, I am not busy,” answered Katharine, dreamily; “Whom did you say?—Miss Sinclair?—ask her to walk in.”—She made a great effort to recover her self-possession, and remembered that Jane was going to be married, that it wanted only a few days to the time, that this was probably her last visit; it would not then do to be wrapt up in her own anxieties. Besides, what had she to fear? Had she not already made up her mind to the worst?

“I wanted to come and see you yesterday, Katharine,” was Jane's opening remark; “but the weather was so bad in the afternoon I could not venture.”—Katharine was glad to talk of the weather, it was such a safe unexciting topic, and they both made sundry sapient observations upon the season, and the short summer, and how soon the leaves had faded, especially along the Maplestead Road, with which Jane showed herself to be particularly well acquainted; and then a little more was said about the ball, and a missionary meeting, and Jane was just beginning to thaw—a process which always required a certain amount of conversation, when Katharine really did hear the quick heavy step for which

she had been so anxiously waiting, and John Ashton threw open the door, behind which Jane was sitting, and, rushing up to his sister, gave her a loud, echoing kiss, and exclaimed, "It's done, Kitty — she'll have me." — Katharine silently withdrew herself, and stood so that he might see Miss Sinclair. His exit was instantaneous, and as the door closed behind him Katharine lost all her self-command, and burst into tears. Jane was not shy then; she was never shy when it was a question of giving comfort. She went up to Katharine and put her arm round her, and said, in the gentlest of voices, "dear Katharine, might I know what is the matter?" — Katharine might have been proud with any one else — pride was one of her faults — not worldly pride, of station and outward advantages, but a pride even more dangerous, the exaggeration of self-respect. She could not bear to show suffering — she did not like pity. To any one but Jane her answer would have been a quick struggle against sorrow, the dashing away of her tears, and the hasty, "nothing, thank you, nothing of any consequence," which as a child had always been her safe reply when any one ventured to intrude upon her hidder feelings. But Jane's pity was like her love, built upon respect. Katharine felt this, though she could not have explained the feeling. Jane did not patronise, but she understood her; and when Jane's question was put, Katharine answered without hesitation, "John is to be married to Selina Fowler." Little further was needed in explanation of Katharine's distress. Jane had heard the report from Colonel Forbes; it was the reason commonly given for John Ashton's wish to take a farm. She had not thought very much about it at the time — it was not natural she should, having her mind so occupied with engrossing interests of her own. It had vexed her for a moment that Colonel Forbes should have made the promise without consulting Mr. Ashton, as he had given her to understand he would do; but she did not like to interfere in matters which were not in her province, and her only comment when the matter was mentioned was: "I hope they may be happy, but I doubt if Katharine Ashton will approve of her sister-in-law."

She reproached herself now for indifference and selfishness; the matter was so much nearer Katharine's heart than she had in the least imagined; and in an instant she had placed herself in Katharine's position, trying to see with her eyes, to feel with her feelings, to understand all the pain, both present and future, which the thoughtless marriage of an only brother, whether refined or unrefined, agreeable or disagreeable, would be likely to cause. "Actually to be married! Is it quite — certainly settled?" she

said, as Katharine took up her work and tried to go on with it, as though nothing were amiss. "He has just been to ask her," replied Katharine. "I was sure beforehand she would say yes; and I don't know why I should be so silly about it."—"She is not fit to be your sister-in-law," continued Jane,—"only, perhaps, Katharine, being with you may improve her."—"No," said Katharine, energetically, "no hope of that, Miss Sinclair. I don't mean that Selly can't be improved,—that would be very wrong in me, and very hard. I dare say something may improve her by-and-by, but it won't be any thing I can do: she looks down upon me."—"No! no! impossible!" exclaimed Jane.—"Yes, she looks down upon me," replied Katharine, "in her way, that is;" she added, with an April smile brightening her face, "which is a way I don't at all care for; but it will keep me from doing her good, even if it were in me. I don't know whether I am right, Miss Sinclair, but I think sometimes that people must have gone some steps already in the right way before they learn any thing from those they fancy beneath them."—"Yes, possibly," replied Jane, thoughtfully; "but I cannot say myself that I see the great difference, unless"—and she laughed—"unless you will allow the advantage to be on your side."—"There is the shop," replied Katharine, "and you know I am part of the shop; but I don't care about myself in the least; only—John—he is my only brother" (the quick tears again rushed to her eyes, but they were bravely kept back), "and I used to hope he would marry some one sensible, who would keep him up to business, and help him on to do his duty. Marriage is such a very important thing."—"Yes, indeed," was Jane's short, but emphatic reply.—"It must have such a great influence upon people's future lives," continued Katharine; "if it does not help them on it must draw them back; and if it is not happy it must be so very unhappy."—"Yes," again repeated Jane, keeping her eyes fixed upon the ground; "I have heard all this said by others," continued Katharine, her face becoming animated, and her eyes kindling with eagerness; "but I never felt how true it was till now. Oh! Miss Sinclair, it is a terrible risk!" A pale pink flush coloured Jane's cheek: she looked up suddenly.—"Katharine, you must not frighten me."—"Oh! I forgot—I forgot," and Katharine seized her hand; "but it cannot be the same with you; you must have judged so wisely."—"I hope so," said Jane, quietly. "I don't doubt it," she added, after a moment's pause. Something—it was a feeling which often recurred to Katharine in after years—an undefined, yet vivid sense of painful misgiving—stopped the reply which suggested itself; she could not say "you can have

no cause to doubt."—"I came here partly, this afternoon, to tell you about Thursday," continued Jane, speaking with the quiet simplicity which was habitual to her, "and to ask if you would mind coming to say 'good-bye' to me. I shall not be at the breakfast; we are to go some way beyond London, so there would not be time; but if you were at the house when"—her words came a little more quickly, and with some confusion of manner—"afterwards, when we come back from church. I thought I should like it; if you would not think it a trouble, that is."—"A trouble! Oh! Miss Sinclair,"—and in a moment the cloud passed away from Katharine's face—"it is so very, very kind! I could not have hoped you would have thought of me."—"I was sure you would think of me, Katharine," said Jane; "and we have known each other so many years."—"Yes, a great, great many. I like to look back and remember them; but somehow it makes me sad. But I ought not to speak of sadness, though, when every thing about you is so bright."—"Speak of any thing you like," replied Jane, smiling; "my brightness is not of a kind to make me forget other people's cares. Marriage puts one at the beginning of a strange, new life, and gives one enough that is sobering to think about."—"And you will live at Maplestead," said Katharine, "and have a house of your own, and visitors, and parties; I am afraid I shall never see you."—"Sometimes, I hope," said Jane, playfully; "I don't mean quite to forget all my old friends. But, Katharine, I was half inclined, when I came, to ask a favour of you, which might bring us more together; only, I am afraid you have so much upon your mind now, you may not know how to attend to other things."—"I have it in my mind to finish making my mother's gown," said Katharine, lightly, as she held up her work, "but I don't know that I have any thing else. If you mean as to John and Selina, the less I think about them the better, for I can do them no good in the world."—"Then, perhaps, you would not care for having your thoughts distracted," said Jane, "by taking a little charge of my poor people." Katharine felt very uncomfortable. Was she really to become a district visitor? What would her father say?—"Pray don't mind saying 'no,'" continued Jane; "I depend upon your being honest. I would not have mentioned the subject if I had not felt sure you would be; and you must not think I want to leave all the charge upon you;—but the fact is, I cannot quite bear giving up the people all of a sudden, they are so used to me, and I like some of them so much; but, of course, when I am at Maplestead, it will be impossible to go on as I have done; and, when I was thinking about it, it struck me that, perhaps, if you and I were

to join together, and you were to see them regularly when I could not, it might be the means of keeping them still under my own eye. Was that very selfish? Would you rather have a district all to yourself?"—"No! indeed," exclaimed Katharine, hastily; "I never thought of having a district at all; I should not know what to do with one, and I have so very little time; and I don't think my father and mother would quite like it."—Jane looked disappointed and uncomfortable, as a very shy, nervous person naturally would, who had made an unacceptable request. She hastened to escape from her difficulty. "Oh! that is enough; pray don't trouble about it; don't think any thing more upon the subject; I shall do quite well. I assure you it would vex me if you were to put yourself out of your way on my account. I can easily give up the district; in fact, perhaps I ought to do so, for I shall have enough to attend to with the poor people at Maplestead." Katharine said nothing, and the pause was extremely awkward. Jane wished to go, but she did not like to move, because it would seem as if she was annoyed. "Have you seen Jemmy Dawes, lately?" she asked, not being able to think of any thing else to say.—"I saw him once last week, and once this," said Katharine; "he is getting a great deal better. His aunt told me you were kind enough to talk of putting him to school."—"Yes; to the National School. Mrs Reeves says she will undertake to see that the penny a-week is paid for him." Another pause. Katharine was thinking all this time. When a thinking fit came upon her, she generally gave way to it; she had not learnt the lesson of society, to talk all the more lightly and indifferently, because the heart is engrossed with other subjects.

The result of her thoughts was known when Jane stood up to go. "I should not like quite to say, 'no,' to your notion about the district, Miss Sinclair; perhaps I ought to take it."—"I don't see any ought in the case," replied Jane, "if you have not time, and if your father and mother would not like it."—"I said that because it came into my head at the moment," replied Katharine; "perhaps I might make time; perhaps my father and mother would not care after I had talked to them a little about it."—"And perhaps you would burden yourself, and put yourself quite out of your way to please me," said Jane kindly. "No, no, Katharine, don't think any thing more about it; I only mentioned it because it was an idea which came into my head last night; and after all, as I said before, it may be better for me not to try and continue the district; it may be much better cared for—I dare say it will be—by some one else."—"But

is there any one else wishing to take it?" inquired Katharine. — "Not just at this moment that I know of, but I shall hear to-morrow; there is a district meeting to-morrow." — "And if you give it up then, you won't have any chance of it again," said Katharine, with an air of thought. "No; but pray, Katharine, don't trouble about it, indeed you will vex me if you do." — "Perhaps I ought," said Katharine, as if she was speaking to herself. Jane laughed. "Dear Katharine, what a conscience you have! I shall be afraid ever to mention any thing of the kind to you again." — "If I ought I will," said Katharine, resolutely, and not heeding Jane's remark. Then looking up more brightly, she added, "I should like to help you, Miss Sinclair, — it is not that. You don't think I would not do any thing in the world to help you, do you?" — "No, indeed Katharine, I could never doubt you, but —" "I suppose it is not right to send away duties any more than beggars, when they knock at one's door," said Katharine, interrupting the excuse which she felt was going to be made for her; "so, if you please, I will hear some more; won't you sit down again?" She moved a chair towards Jane, and sat down herself. It would have been impossible to resist her determination, and Jane, though not at all satisfied that she was doing wisely, sat down. "Will you tell me how often you go to your district, and how often I ought to go, if I undertook it?" asked Katharine. "I am obliged to go round once a fortnight to change the tracts," said Jane. "I beg your pardon — change what did you say?" — "The tracts, — the little books, — you must have seen them at Jemmy's cottage, marked 'District Visiting Society,' on the outside." Katharine did remember some thin pamphlets, covered with paper — brown by nature, doubly brown by dirt. She had looked into one once, and thought it contained very long, hard words. "And would that be part of my business?" she asked. "Well! yes," said Jane, with a smile on her face, but a little hesitation of manner. "I don't see how it could be avoided; because I could not be sure of being in Rilworth regularly, though it seems hard to put off the most disagreeable part of the duty upon you. The tracts we have are most of them very old and very dirty, but Mr. Reeves promises us a new set soon. I always put them in a basket though," she added, laughing, "and go down the back street, for I don't wish exactly to be known, as the boys say, for one of the ladies that go 'a-tracking.'" — "And what is the good of the tracts?" asked Katharine simply. "I suppose they may be a good deal of good if the

people read them, or if when they read they can understand them," replied Jane, "which sometimes I doubt. But at any rate, they are useful in giving one an excuse for going to houses which otherwise one should have no reason for visiting." — "And what do you do when you do go to those houses?" inquired Katharine. "Not much," answered Jane, "perhaps only ask how the people are, and say what a fine day it is, — but it is a means of becoming acquainted with them, and then if they are in distress they will come to one as a friend. And there is a great deal of distress — more than people have any idea of," she added, "in those respectable rows of white cottages, with little gardens before them, in the outskirts of Rilworth." — "But," said Katharine, — and she paused — "if people come to me in distress, I shall not know what to say to them. I shall only be able to tell them to go to Mr. Reeves." — "Precisely the very thing," said Jane, in a tone of amusement; "the very direction which Mr. Reeves gives himself. If the people are in distress, they must be sent to him. But, Katharine, there is a great deal of trouble in the world — not clergyman's trouble — not what they can help; little tiny things, about which no one would like to take up their time, but which I am sure it is a great comfort to be able to tell to some one; money troubles, and frettings of temper, and discomforts; and the better class of people have just as much of this kind of care as the very poor, and that is the reason why the tracts are good things. Once a fortnight, at least, you have a reason for going to them, and hearing something about their affairs. And then there are so many little kindnesses to be done, not a clergyman's work; which no clergyman in fact could attend to; such as getting their children admitted to schools, or finding places for them as servants." Katharine looked a little aghast. "You think it will take up a great deal of time," said Jane, noticing the change in her countenance. "Yes, more a great deal, I am afraid, than I shall have to spare," was the reply. "It does take time," continued Jane, "but you don't know, Katharine, how much can be managed in that way, by doing a little often. I never have been as busy as you, but I have sometimes had a great many interruptions and occupations, when people have been staying with us; and lately," she added, blushing, "you know I have not been able to be my own mistress; but I have contrived still to go on with the district. Sometimes I have not been able to give round the tracts as often as I should, but I never troubled myself about that. I did what I could, and left the rest. And I used to

manage to go and see any persons I wanted to see particularly, at odd times; sometimes just before I went for a walk, and sometimes when I came back; and now and then, if I was very much behindhand, I gave up every thing else for a day, and went out both in the morning and the afternoon. I think the more one has to do, the more time one learns to find to do it in." — "And your mamma never objected to your going about, then?" asked Katharine. "She would have objected perhaps," said Jane, "if I had followed my own way. She used to object sometimes at the place we lived in before we came to Rilworth, because then I was so very much bent upon giving up every thing for my district, that I made myself quite ill. But Mr. Reeves has been my help here. He told me I might do what I could, and not vex myself if it was little; and he really scolded me one day, when he found that I had given up reading with mamma, because I thought I had not time for that and the district too. He said that people who could not discipline themselves in home duties were not fit to go abroad and offer to help others." — "But I don't know Mr. Reeves," said Katharine; "I shall have no one to help me." — "But you will know him if you are a district visitor," said Jane, "because you will go to the district meetings, and then you will become acquainted with him. I was thinking," she continued, after a moment's consideration, "whether, if you really had any notion of kindly helping me, you would go with me to-morrow morning to the district meeting; it is at eleven o'clock. It would be the only opportunity we might have of being there together." Katharine could not suddenly acquiesce. She said she would think over the matter, and talk to her parents, and send Miss Sinclair an answer in the evening. One difficulty more, an appalling one, presented itself to her mind as she accompanied Jane to the street-door. "When they are ill," she said, — and she stopped Jane from proceeding further, — "do you think it your duty to go and read to them, and talk to them?" — "Now and then, to the old women who are only sickly; or sometimes, if Mr. Reeves tells me, when it is a lingering case, and reading is a comfort; but I don't talk much, I don't know how. I read what Mr. Reeves advises. It is better here, a great deal," she continued, earnestly, "than at Breme, where we were last. The clergyman did not go about there as Mr. Reeves does, and it was a very large parish; and though I had only a few houses in a good part of the town, because mamma objected to any thing else, there were some very distressing cases, — people who were ill, and whom I was nearly sure had been very careless and wicked, but they were not dangerously ill, and so the clergyman

did not visit them much. I used to long to say something to them, but I never knew what. Now and then I read a little, but I did not know what to choose, and it seemed unkind not to find out the comforting parts of the Bible, and yet I was certain in my own mind that they wanted to be roused and frightened. That was very bad; it almost made me feel as if I was doing more harm than good. Perhaps I should have done better to leave the matter alone; but I was not very experienced, and the place was so poor, no one scarcely went about to see the people except mamma and myself. But it is very different here. Mr. Reeves knows every one; and if you ask him what you ought to do, he will tell you at once, and then the responsibility will be off your mind."

That was a comfort to Katharine; yet it still seemed a very awful undertaking to be a district visitor.

A note was sent to Jane in the evening.

"Dear Miss Sinclair,—My father and mother do not mind my trying the district for a little while; so, if you please, I will go to the meeting to-morrow, if you will kindly take me. I think you said eleven o'clock, and I will try to be at your house at the time, unless you had rather not.

"Believe me, dear Miss Sinclair,

"Yours sincerely and respectfully,

"KATHARINE ASHTON."

It was a short note, easily read and easily understood by Jane, but it had cost Katharine a great deal of trouble, or rather its contents had. Mr. Ashton's prejudice against district visitors was not the less violent because it had no tangible foundation; and Mrs. Ashton's fears that Katharine would go into close, unwholesome rooms, and catch a fever and die, were not the less vivid because there was no precedent of any such dire calamity in the annals of the Rilworth District Visiting Society. Katharine had a hard task, and she accomplished it with a tact which was more the result of instinct than of reasoning. She did not attempt to argue, but she coaxed and pleaded, and said how pleasant it would be to help Miss Sinclair, and how much she should like to be friends with Mr. and Mrs. Reeves, till Mr. Ashton's good nature was won over, as usual, to consent to any thing which Katharine seemed to fancy; and Mrs. Ashton's maternal vanity was soothed by the idea that her child's acquaintance with Miss Sinclair would still be kept up. These were not very high motives for such a consent, and it is not said that they were the only ones.

There were many considerations of usefulness and kindness brought forward, and talked over, but the balance for and against the question was nearly equal; and nothing but a rigid self-examination, to which neither Mr. Ashton nor his wife had ever been accustomed, would have enabled them to see what it was that finally decided them.

Katharine was satisfied, but not glad. She was undertaking what she felt to be a duty, but she did not like the idea of it. One feeling she had was, that it would be a check upon her freedom, a constant claim, interfering with her walks and her home pursuits. If she engaged in the work she must, she felt, do it thoroughly, and then it would be a care always upon her mind. She had an idea that people can avoid responsibilities by not undertaking them, overlooking the fact that there is a responsibility of omission as pressing as that of commission, and far more fearful, because, in the generality of instances, we never wake up to be conscious of it until it is too late to remedy our neglect. She went to her room that night with the sense of a burden upon her. Life seemed to have more cares than she was prepared for; — there were to be cares for other people as well as for her own family; but Katharine had no idea of shrinking from the duty. She never had allowed herself to do that, even in her childhood. At school, if a lesson was to be learnt, whatever it might be, it was begun and carried through without delay or hesitation. Her moral step was slow, straightforward, and resolute; slow to determine, straightforward in its direction, resolute in its progress. As yet she wanted warmth and love; but those are the rewards of duty. Yet a feeling, momentary, but not to be forgotten, did come over her as she opened her Bible to read a few verses, according to her constant practice, the last thing before she got into bed — a solemn but thrilling sense of happiness, and it followed upon the words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

CHAPTER XV.

MR. REEVES' study, with the bookcase filled with volumes of divinity, pamphlets, and official reports — and the writing-table, inconvenient to all but one person — and the great arm-chair taking up all the space on one side of the fire-place — assumed an awful aspect to Katharine when she entered it the next morning, notwithstanding the support which she received from Jane's

presence. She could not dispossess herself of the feeling that she was going to make a profession of being better than her neighbours; and was really relieved when Mr. Reeves shook hands in a good-humoured matter-of-fact way, and, without any special remarks upon her new duties, thanked her for offering her assistance, and begged her to sit down. Mr. Reeves was an elderly grey-headed man, with a singularly composed business-like manner. He disappointed many people in consequence. They said he did not impress them in any way—they were not always reminded of his being a clergyman. Perhaps that was a disadvantage in some respects—it made his ordinary actions less regarded; but it had the effect of heightening the value of his earnest advice when he did think it necessary to give it. If such a very practical, matter-of-fact person thought certain duties and feelings of importance, no one could doubt that they were so. In his case there could be no fear of an opinion being the result of poetical enthusiasm. The generality of the persons assembled struck Katharine as being of the same business-like cast, not excepting even Jane Sinclair, with her graceful refinement of manner and most melodious voice. There were two or three elderly ladies, quiet, steady people, who dressed in brown silks, and always wore dark ribbons in their bonnets; and there were the Miss Lockes, two sisters, whose father had been a clerk in some public office, and whom Katharine knew perfectly by sight, though she had never spoken to them; and Mrs. Pearson, the widow of a great ironmonger, a bustling-mannered, active person, who appeared to know the concerns of every one as well as her own, and who was constantly appealed to as an authority; and a young, timid-looking girl, whose name Katharine did not know, but who, like herself, appeared only recently to have entered the society; and last, though not least in her own estimation, Betsey Carter, the eldest daughter of Mr. Carter the linendraper, the same individual who had excited Mr. Ashton's antipathy to district visitors. Three gentlemen visitors also belonged to the society, but they were to have private meetings of their own on another day. The ladies sat round the room at some distance from the table, and a little murmuring conversation went on, whilst Mr. Reeves looked over some accounts. They seemed all quite at home with Jane, and shook hands with her, and inquired for Mrs. Sinclair; and Jane was not as shy as usual, though she coloured rather when Mrs. Pearson asked if it was true that they were going to lose her as a district visitor. Miss Carter was vehement in her regrets when she heard Jane's answer, and equally vehement in her hope

that Katharine would take advantage of the good instruction Miss Sinclair would be sure to give; and then she began to offer a little advice of her own upon the best way of dealing with Dissenters, which made Mr. Reeves put aside his accounts, and, standing up, say, after glancing round the room to see that all were present, "I am sorry to say Mrs. Reeves is not well enough to be here to-day, so perhaps we had better begin." Every one knelt down, Katharine of course with them; but the prayers came upon her rather as a surprise, and she could not collect her thoughts immediately and attend properly. They were very short, and Katharine did not exactly see why some of the collects which were used should have been selected; but the prayers gave her a feeling of unity, and she felt as if it would not do to gossip and talk upon useless subjects afterwards. Mr. Reeves reseated himself and asked for the reports. One of the brown ladies happened to be sitting nearest to him, and delivered hers first. It was chiefly statistical; how many visits had been paid, how many tickets given, &c. Mr. Reeves noted them in a book, and gave the tickets required for the next month. So he went round the circle, but not always without comment. Some of the reports had cases of distress marked down, and the details were given to Mr. Reeves, or occasionally reserved for a private interview. Other subjects were discussed more generally; these were, for the most part, when persons had removed from one district to another, or when, as was frequently the case, the children of the family were in fault, and then references were made to the rules of the National Schools, and precedents quoted, and opinions given in parliamentary style. Miss Carter was especially prominent in her remarks, putting Mr. Reeves right in two instances, and suggesting to him that he had better call himself and give some advice to a woman whose child had been taken from the school unnecessarily. Katharine quite felt with her father, that if it was necessary for all district visitors to be like her, the office was not a desirable one; but Betsey was the exception. Generally speaking, nothing could be more unpretending, unexciting, even dull, than the meeting. It required more imagination and more enthusiasm than Katharine possessed, or than she thought she was ever likely to possess, to elevate such prosaic duties into a religious devotion to the service of God. She wondered more and more that Jane Sinclair, with her peculiarly high-bred tone of thought and feeling, her cultivation of mind, and dreamy poetic enthusiasm, the influence of which Katharine always felt even when she did not comprehend it, could bring herself to work

heartily with persons so unlike herself, and not only listen to, but thoroughly interest herself in the every-day details of the lives of the poor.

Mr. Reeves was very kind and cordial in all he said and did, and showed a wonderfully accurate knowledge of his parish; but his way of speaking of every thing was too business-like to be attractive. It did not make Katharine feel that she could ask him questions if she were in a difficulty; yet she saw that there was a general feeling of confidence in him, and that he listened as attentively to small matters as to great ones. Perhaps by and by she might be more accustomed to him and more at ease; if not, she thought there would be but little to help her, and district visiting would be even more difficult and disagreeable than she had imagined. The tickets for the month were given to Jane, so that Katharine really had nothing either to say or to do. She grew very weary when the conversation became discursive, and the Miss Lockes began talking to one of the brown ladies about some of their home affairs; and Mrs. Pearson and Betsey Carter entered into a long argument as to some new kind of work which had been introduced into the school. Mr. Reeves appeared to her to possess a wonderful amount of patience; he finished his copy of the reports, and waited without any irritation of manner till Mrs. Pearson had concluded a description of a sampler worked when she was young, and afterwards framed and glazed; and then he stood up as before, and said, "I think our business is finished," and all knelt down again, and there were two or three more short prayers, and the meeting was at an end.

Some shook hands with Jane as they went away, some did not; but there was no question of worldly distinction, only of degrees of acquaintance. In a certain sense all were one—that was the chief impression left upon Katharine's mind when the rest of the visitors departed, and she, at Jane's request, remained to speak to Mr. Reeves. Somehow, in spite of the dullness, and dryness, and coldness, and odd mixture of prayers and business, they were one.

Mr. Reeves' manner changed when he was left alone with Katharine and Jane. He was very methodical when he had business to do; he showed that he had not leisure for subjects not immediately concerning his parish; but the accounts and the district tickets put aside, he took Katharine's hand cordially, and said that it had given him great pleasure to see her there,—pleasure, if he might say so, as much for her own sake as for that of the poor. Katharine was a little frightened, and very much pleased.—"She should like," she said, "to be of use, but she was afraid

she should make a very bad visitor, especially after Miss Sinclair." — "Especially with Miss Sinclair, you mean," said Jane, laughing. — "I am not going to give up my poor people entirely, Katharine." — "We hope not," said Mr. Reeves, kindly; "the poor people would be very sorry. — But, my dear Miss Ashton, what I wanted to say to you, and what I asked Miss Sinclair to keep you behind for was, to beg you to come to me at any time or any moment and let me know your difficulties, and how I can help you. — You know," he added, with a smile, "that I am especially bound to aid those who are working for me." — "If their work is worth anything," said Katharine. — "Perhaps I may be a better judge than you are of the value of the work," said Mr. Reeves; "but one thing I will venture to say, that if you will only take courage and continue it, you will find it an incalculable blessing to yourself if not to your poor people." — "Katharine has a faint heart, I am afraid," said Jane, looking at her affectionately, and noticing that she was pale, and had a more tired, distressed air than usual. — "All our duties might give us faint hearts if we had nothing besides to depend upon," answered Mr. Reeves thoughtfully; "but it is quite true that district visiting — all visiting amongst the poor — must give us faint hearts; and that is what I should like, Miss Ashton, and in fact every one engaging in it, to consider beforehand. I dread most especially sentimental enthusiasm in such matters. It never lasts, and it always does harm. The work which you have undertaken, my dear Miss Ashton, is very up-hill and trying; often extremely disheartening, always to a certain degree oppressive." — "And I don't think I shall have time enough," said Katharine, bringing out boldly the fear which at the moment weighed most upon her. — "Perhaps not the time that you would wish, but give what you can; if every one did that, the world would be a very different place from what it is. And, to tell you the truth, I doubt if you, or any person who has not been accustomed to really hard work, can at all tell how much it is possible to do in the day." — "And Katharine need only learn by degrees, need she?" observed Jane. "She may begin with very little, and then go on to more — that is what I did." — "But I should not like that," replied Katharine; "I should be glad to know at once all that I have to undertake, and then I should be able to make up my mind to it." — "Is not that a little impatient?" asked Mr. Reeves. "It is not the way in which it is God's will to deal with us. He begins with us gently, and leads us on step by step. I think we might do well to practise something of the same lesson in dealing with ourselves. I should rather advise

that Miss Sinclair's experience should be your guide. She knows all the poor people, and she will tell you what she has been accustomed to do, and which are the most pressing cases to be attended to. If you will content yourself with these for a beginning, I think you will do wisely; and don't look forward, don't try to fancy what you will do in any sudden emergency or difficulty, but go on quietly from day to day, doing, as I said before, what you can—only," he added more seriously, "let it be what you can,—not what you happen to wish or like."—"That is not in Katharine's way," said Jane; "the fear with her will be that she will overwork herself."—Katharine was thoughtful for a moment; then she said: "No, Miss Sinclair, it is not that. I can work very hard when I see what I have to do, but I am not quick in seeing."—"A common fault," remarked Mr. Reeves, in a tone of kindness which Katharine felt to be very encouraging, "especially amongst"—He seemed a little doubtful how to express himself.—"Amongst tradespeople?" said Katharine. He smiled.—"Not exclusively amongst tradespeople; they form part of the class I mean—a large part, certainly;—but generally speaking amongst persons who lead useful, domestic lives, and have daily business to attend to."—"They are so very useful already," said Jane, "it seems hard to expect them to think of anything more. Idle people, like myself, on the contrary, would be miserable without the work."—"Exactly so; and yet, my dear Miss Sinclair, when one looks at the present state of England, and its vast needs, it is impossible not to feel that all—not only idle people, but busy people—must exert themselves, if any radical improvement is to be effected."—"And there are not many idle people in Rilworth," said Katharine.—"No, nor in any of our country towns. The influential persons are persons in trade; and if real good amongst the lower classes is to be effected, it must be by their means."—"They don't all think so," said Katharine, quickly, as she remembered how strange this doctrine would sound to her father and mother.—"I don't think they do," replied Mr. Reeves; "there are many exceptions of course; but very often they seem to consider the care of the poor as a peculiar province of the clergyman, assisted, perhaps, by one or two idle persons, like Miss Sinclair. And so it is," he added, "that I hail with greater satisfaction a recruit from the business ranks than I do from any other. Your example, my dear Miss Ashton, may do more than Miss Sinclair's, and she will not mind my saying so."—"But I never thought about the duty before," said Katharine, "and I don't see why I am to expect that others should."—"One may

hope, though one may not venture to expect," said Mr. Reeves; "I quite agree with you that it is difficult to open people's eyes to new duties, and especially so when they have already enough before them to occupy all their attention. But that is the peculiar danger of persons in business, in any business, whether professional or trading. They seem to have no surplus either of time, or thought, or money, and it does not enter their heads that they ought to make any."—"And then people are shy," said Katharine, in an apologetic tone. "I should never have liked to offer myself if it had not been for Miss Sinclair."—Mr. Reeves looked pained, not at Katharine's speech, but at something in his own mind.—"Yes," he said, "our English exclusiveness comes in there—we are all afraid of each other."—"We need not be," said Jane, and she involuntarily glanced at Katharine, as if feeling that in her case there could be no obstacle in the way of kindly feeling. "There are faults on both sides," said Mr. Reeves, "but I will not enter upon that subject now. Some day or other, when Miss Ashton and I are better acquainted, we may be able to talk about it. Besides," and he took out his watch, "I must send you away now, for I have a person coming to me on business at half-past twelve."

Could it be so late? Katharine did not believe it possible; the time had gone very quickly, at least the latter part of it. "Then you will apply to me in any difficulty," said Mr. Reeves, as Katharine wished him good-bye; "and you must let me call and see you sometimes, and bring Mrs. Reeves with me: she will be able to help you in many matters which are out of my province. I need not say," he added very earnestly, "that new duties are a reason for new prayers. We shall all go wrong if we forget that."

Katharine went home with Jane, and they spent another half-hour in going over the names of the people in the district, and settling what was to be done with them. Jane very much wished to have gone round with Katharine, and thus to have introduced her to the people whom she did not know; but it was not possible; the next three days would be incessantly employed; and Colonel Forbes (though Jane did not say so) was so exacting, so grudging of every moment of her time, that she could not venture to undertake any new work. All she could do was to give Katharine the tracts which were to be distributed the next time, properly numbered and marked; and to advise her, when she went to any house, to say that she was come instead of Miss Sinclair, who hoped to pay them a visit again very soon. Jane heaved a sigh of mingled relief and regret as she gave Katharine her tract basket,

and delivered up the tickets which were to supply the district for the next month. "It seems saying good-bye to it all," she said; "I can never again do what I have done. Oh! Katharine, how good-byes make one wish that one had done better!" Katharine put the basket on the table—her heart almost misgave her. "That was naughty of me," said Jane, "I have frightened you, but I did not intend it. One thing I can say honestly, that I would not but have done it for all that the world can give." Katharine took up the basket again, but she was very grave. "I shall not see you again, dear Miss Sinclair, only on Thursday. What time must I be there?"—"At half-past ten, if you don't mind waiting. I should not like to miss you, and I might if you came later."—"And you will never be Miss Sinclair again," observed Katharine. "Do you mind my saying, I shall never like the other name as well?"—"Wait till you are used to it," said Jane, with a bright smile; "and Katharine, I promise you, whatever I may be in name to others, I will always be Miss Sinclair in heart to you." Katharine's heart was too full for any words; her pressure of Jane's hand was almost convulsive; and gathering up the tickets which were scattered on the table, she hurried away.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was Thursday morning. Katharine came down to breakfast, dressed in a dark green silk, her Sunday dress; Mrs. Ashton in a dark brown one. The breakfast hour was eight, rather before than after; but this morning Mr. Ashton was particularly busy, and they were late. Katharine tried not to be impatient. "Mother, dear," she said, after they had waited more than ten minutes, "don't you think I might go and hurry my father? I should be so sorry not to get a good place."—"Yes; and tell him the tea has been standing nearly a quarter of an hour; he can't bear cold tea." Katharine put the tea-kettle on the fire to avoid the necessity of such a punishment, and went to call her father, stopping, as she passed the window, to look out, in order to be quite sure that the morning was going to be fine. "We are to begin breakfast without him," she said, as she came back. "Mr. Fowler is just come in."—"Then no need for us to trouble ourselves about him," observed Mrs. Ashton, "they will be talking for another half-hour. Where's John?"—"Not down yet, but I suppose he will be directly; that won't do for the farm, mother,

will it?" — "He will get up fast enough when he has business of his own to attend to," said Mrs. Ashton, who could not endure the slightest imputation upon her son; "your father never got up properly till he was forced to do it. But sit down, Kitty, and give me some tea, and make haste, for I must give Susan directions about the market before we go to the church." Katharine did not talk very much during breakfast, though she answered all her mother said with a very tolerable show of attention. She was obliged to be more alive to common matters, however, when her father came in, which he did when breakfast was about half over, and happily after, and not before, John made his appearance. His first exclamation drew from her the plan of the day's proceedings. "Why how brave you look, Kitty, this morning! And you too, wife! What's the matter with you both? John, my boy, you and I are not half good enough for such company." — "One would think they were going to be married," said John, gazing on his sister's pleasant face, and slight, neat figure, with evident complacency; "I'm sure Kitty is smart enough." — "Who knows but what I may be going to be married? one of these days, that is," said Katharine, laughing; "but John, I really am going to see a wedding, and my father knows it, only he has forgotten it." — "Of course I have," said Mr. Ashton. "What is the use of remembering such fooleries? Bad enough to have made a show of oneself once in one's life, hey, wife? Do you remember my fine blue coat, and how it did not come in time from the tailor's, and how your father offered to lend me the one he was married in? I warrant, Kate, your Colonel and his bride won't have any thing half so fine as that." — "I dare say not," said Katharine; "but I don't much care for Colonel Forbes, only I hope he will make Miss Sinclair happy." — "So like you women," said Mr. Ashton, "all for dress: a bridegroom is nobody, because he doesn't wear a white veil and orange flowers." — "Well! somehow," observed Mrs. Ashton, "one does think very little of the bridegroom at a wedding." — "Except that it could not go on without him," said John, a little fiercely, thinking, probably, of his own prospective happiness, and not choosing to be so overlooked. "No one would be likely either to overlook Colonel Forbes," he added, "he will make himself first wherever he is." — "And very right, too," observed Mr. Ashton; "defend me from a man who is ruled by his wife." — "Miss Sinclair is much more likely to spoil her husband than to rule him," said Katharine. "I should like to know what you mean by spoiling, Kate," said John. — "Aye, let us hear," added Mr. Ashton; "it

won't do, you know, John, to have bad counsel given by-and-by, will it?" — "No," replied John with a smile: for he was always pleased when any allusion was made to his own marriage. "I won't have bad notions put into Selly's head, I warn you of that, Kitty!" — "I should be very sorry to put bad notions, as you call them, into any one's head," replied Katharine; "and I don't know much about how people go on when they are married; but I do think that living with a person like Miss Sinclair, who would be always giving up her own will, would be spoiling to any one." — "Trust Miss Sinclair for that!" replied John; "she will know fast enough how to have a will of her own when she is Mrs. Forbes. Where is the woman who does not know it?" — "Aye, where?" echoed Mr. Ashton, triumphantly. "I just ask you now, wife, whether, when there's a question between you and me, you don't always carry the day?" — "I can't say for that, my dear," was the reply. "I think it's pretty equal; but we don't often have questions that I can remember." — "But," said Katharine, "what I should call spoiling would not be giving up in great matters, but being afraid to differ, and always humouring little fancies, and that sort of thing." — "And that you wouldn't do, Kitty, hey?" asked Mr. Ashton; "take my advice, and never let that secret out, or depend upon it you'll never get a husband." — "I don't say that I should not do it," said Katharine. "I dare say if I was very fond of a person I should, because I should like to please him; but it wouldn't be the less spoiling for that, and it would not be the less likely to make a man selfish, and so end in taking away one's respect." Katharine did not add, "That is what I am afraid for Miss Sinclair;" she could not bear to realise her own fears, especially before those who would not be likely to understand them. "Well! you must have a husband made expressly for you, Kitty," said Mr. Ashton; "it is not every one that will do for you, that's clear. I should have thought now such a man as Colonel Forbes was just the person likely to take every woman's fancy — good-looking, and smooth-spoken, with an air of being somebody which there's no mistaking. I wonder what you would want more?" — "I couldn't say," replied Katharine, "and happily for me I am not obliged to say. — I am not going to marry Colonel Forbes." — "But still, what should you wish more?" inquired John. "I should just like to know for curiosity's sake." — "Well," replied Katharine, "it would be hard to tell; but in any case I should like to be quite sure of what a man is at home as well as abroad, and I should like to hear

something about him from his mother and sisters, if he had any. I have a great notion that a man who does not make himself pleasant in his own family is not likely to do so in the long run to his wife." — "Nonsense," exclaimed John, "how would you get the sisters to speak the truth about their brother?" — "There, again, I don't know how I should do it," replied Katharine; "but there would be certainly some way of finding out. At any rate, if his own family were not much to him, which is easily known by a person's way of talking, I should think that I had better not have any thing to do with him." — "Vastly prudent, Kitty," said Mr. Ashton, laughing; "but, unfortunately, you don't know any thing about the matter. People tumble into love and marry, and then begin to ask questions when the deed is done. As for Colonel Forbes, I never heard he had any sisters or mother either." — "Oh! yes he has," replied Katharine, "sisters at least; two of them are to be Miss Sinclair's bridesmaids." — "Well, they can't have been much at Maplestead," observed Mr. Ashton, "or we should have been sure to have seen them." — "He is a curious man, the Colonel," said John, thoughtfully. "I have been talking to some of his tenants lately, and they say they would rather confront a wild bull than thwart him." — "Passionate is he?" said Mr. Ashton, "I should not have thought that." — "Not passionate," replied John; "but he just turns off and says nothing, and doesn't forget." — "Umph!" was Mr. Ashton's comment. Katharine did not want to hear any thing further. She asked if any one wished for more tea, and when the answer was given in the negative, rose from the table, locked the tea-caddy, and went up stairs. — "Kate does not like the Colonel, but she won't have him abused," said John Ashton, as his sister left the room. — "That's natural enough," replied Mrs. Ashton, "so fond as she is of Miss Sinclair. But what is the use of troubling about it all beforehand. When people are married they must get on some how." — "Or any how, hey, wife?" observed Mr. Ashton, patting his wife on the shoulder. "But never mind, the 'any how' has done well enough for us, and we will hope it will do the same for the Colonel and Miss Sinclair."

Katharine was provoked with herself for having encouraged the conversation. It had filled her with uncomfortable thoughts. She wished that she had been contented to go as she had promised, and say "good bye" to Jane, and had not persuaded her mother to accompany her to the church. Then she might have stolen away quietly, and nothing would have been said. She did not

like it to be supposed that she had any feeling against Colonel Forbes, it was so silly. What reason had she for disliking him? She who, except on that one occasion at the ball, had never exchanged half a dozen words with him. And why should she not trust to Jane Sinclair's opinion? Why should the fact of his apparent separation from his family, and the chance opinion expressed of him by a tenant, tell more against him in her mind than all Jane's devoted admiration and affection? She tried to shake off the impression, and, putting on her bonnet, went into the kitchen to her mother to see if she could help her in any way before they went out; and then she returned to the parlour, and when Susan had taken away the breakfast things, busied herself with putting it in order, arranging the books in their shelves, and dusting the little china ornaments on the mantel piece—any thing rather than stand still and think that it was Jane Sinclair's wedding-day.

"Come, Kitty, are you ready; we shall be late;" and Mrs. Ashton, having kept her daughter waiting for at least ten minutes, became at last extremely impatient.—"One moment, mother." Katharine folded up her duster and put it where it was always kept, in the drawer of the bureau, and hurried after Mrs. Ashton.—"Ten was the time I think you said, Kate? Just look up at the town-clock; my eyes are rather weak this morning. It wants twenty minutes, doesn't it?"—"Yes, mother, just twenty; we shall be in very good time and no one will take our seat."—"I don't know that, Kitty. Folks are not over particular at a wedding."—Mrs. Ashton quickened her step, so that Katharine could scarcely keep pace with her. Happily there was in consequence no fear of talking, and no leisure for thinking. At the church-door a crowd of idle boys and untidy women were assembled, and a few well-dressed persons were straggling into the building one after the other; but there were not so very many, as Mrs. Ashton remarked, so it was to be hoped their seat was not taken. It would have been if they had been five minutes later, for it was one of the best seats in the church for seeing;—in the transept, but close to the chancel. The west end of the church was hidden, but that did not so much signify. A good deal of walking about and whispering was going on between the clerk and the sexton, and benches were being moved from the chancel, so as to give greater space. It was not much like the preparation for a religious service, and the people in the pews were some standing up, some sitting down, and all looking about. Katharine placed herself as much out of sight as possible behind a pillar, and then she knelt

down and prayed, not only the usual prayer, that she might remember that she was in the house of God, but a special one, deeply, intensely earnest, for Jane Sinclair,—for her happiness—her goodness;—for happiness even more than for goodness. Katharine had faith in the one; she did not know why she distrusted the other. She sat down afterwards and tried not to be disturbed by all the movement about her; and looked steadily at the altar and the coloured glass in the east window in order to sober her thoughts, till at last there were sounds of carriage-wheels, and her mother whispered, “They are coming, Kate,” and then, like every one else, she turned towards the entrance to look. They came up the aisle—a party of gaily-dressed ladies in their brilliant silks and muslins, and gentlemen in full dress—and crowded into the chancel; and Mr. Reeves came out from the vestry and took his place at the altar; and, after a very short delay, Jane Sinclair followed, leaning upon the arm of her uncle—her mother’s only brother. Katharine saw that she was dressed in white, that she wore a white veil, but she noticed nothing else, not even the young bridesmaids who followed; only, as the little procession entered the chancel, she bent forward to look at Jane’s sweet colourless face, and saw that it was untroubled in its inward peace, though very serious; and her own heart grew lighter and beat less anxiously.

The wedding party ranged themselves round the altar, and Katharine could see little of any countenance then, except that of Mrs. Sinclair. She was standing close to Jane, but so as rather to look down the church. It was a face not easily to be read; time had traced upon it the furrows of many griefs; they seemed more deeply imprinted upon it at that moment than they had ever been before. But were they the sorrows of the past or the future?—Katharine could not guess; but she thought of the lonely hearth, the empty chamber, and marvelled that a wedding should ever be considered gay.

And the service began and continued without pause. The promise was made to love, and comfort, and honour, and keep in sickness and in health; and who that looked upon the gallant, honourable, true-hearted English gentleman, and the gentle girl at his side, so graceful in her loving timidity, yet so honest in the open avowal of her affection, could doubt that the vow would be kept?

Not Katharine. As they knelt together at the altar, and she heard Jane, with a clear voice, steadily and unflinchingly give her troth, every shadow of misgiving vanished.

To grieve her, to disappoint her,—so pure, so unselfish, so devoted, it would be impossible ! Only one pang shot through Katharine's mind as they left the church. It had been Jane's wish that the service should be concluded with the Holy Communion. Why was this—the first wish of her married life—set aside ?

Katharine and her mother parted at the church-door—Mrs. Ashton to hurry home and see that nothing had gone wrong in her absence, Katharine to make her way as well as she could through the crowd, and hasten through quiet back streets to Mrs. Sinclair's house. She was expected, and the servants took her up stairs to Jane's dressing-room. The lobby on the outside was filled with a large imperial, and several smaller packages and baskets, ranged ready for departure ; her maid was busy putting up the few last things. Katharine asked if she could be of any use, and occupied a few moments in assisting to fold some dresses, but she was soon interrupted. The carriage had driven back quickly, and Jane stayed but a short time in the drawing-room to receive the congratulations of her friends, and then was hurried away by Colonel Forbes to prepare for her journey.

Two of the bridesmaids (Colonel Forbes' sisters) accompanied her ; they all came into the room together, and Katharine drew back. Jane looked eagerly round the room. "I thought—Oh ! Katharine, you are there. How kind of you !" She held out her hand to Katharine, and a warm pressure was interchanged. But Katharine could only say "Dear Miss Sinclair," and then blush, and apologise, and retreat again to the side of the lady's maid. "Please go down stairs, dears," said Jane, addressing her sisters-in-law, "and do what you can to make Philip patient, and I will be ready in two minutes. And don't let them keep dear mamma talking in the drawing-room, I must have her with me." Mrs. Sinclair was already at the dressing-room door, and Miss Forbes and her sister retreated. Katharine was going too. "No, please not," and Jane laid her hand upon her arm to stop her ; "you will help me." Mrs. Sinclair came in as quietly composed as in her every-day life, only there was a little tremulousness in her voice, as she said, "My child, are you ready ?" Jane threw herself into her arms : "My own mother ! how cruel to leave you !" She sat down in a chair and buried her face in her hands. Mrs. Sinclair stooped down and kissed her, and whispered something in her ear ; and Jane rose up self-collected and tearless, but she could not speak again. Her mother and the maid assisted her to change her dress, and Katharine took the

rich white silk, and folded it, and laid it in the trunk left open for it. The room looked out into the street, and they heard the servants packing the carriage, and Colonel Forbes giving orders. Some one came for the last box, and Katharine helped the maid to carry it out of the room, and returned alone. She felt then that she must go, and she went up to Jane and asked if she could do any thing else for her. Jane took her hand, and placed on her finger a small ring. "Please wear it, dear Katharine, and remember me, and to-day; and pray for me," she added, in a low, broken whisper, as she bent forward and kissed her forehead. The eager blood rushed to Katharine's cheek:—"Remember you, Miss Sinclair,—how could I ever forget?" She turned away, and walked slowly down the stairs.

Katharine stood in the hall with the servants; she could not make up her mind to go till she had seen the carriage drive off. There was great bustle and confusion in the house, and a good deal of talking in the drawing-room; in the dining-room servants and waiters were preparing the wedding breakfast. Colonel Forbes came several times into the hall, and went out to the carriage to see that every thing was properly packed, for he did not seem to like trusting to servants. He was extremely particular about all Jane's packages, and made the maid tell him what she would especially want, and got into the carriage himself to be sure that every thing was placed comfortably for her. "Now, is that the last?" he said, as the small trunk which Katharine had assisted to pack, was lifted up to the carriage-box. "Yes, sir, all."—"Then go and tell your mistress that we have not a moment to spare." He took out his watch and held it in his hand, counting the minutes as he walked up and down the hall. Jane appeared immediately, not with her mother, but her uncle. Her veil was down, but Katharine saw the large tears rolling down her cheek. Colonel Forbes took her from her uncle, whom he shook heartily but impatiently by the hand, handed her into the carriage, and placed himself beside her. "My shawl—I have forgotten my shawl," Katharine heard her say. Before any one else could move, Katharine had rushed up herself to the dressing-room for it. She brought it to the carriage-door. "Thank you, thank you," said Colonel Forbes, as he took it from her. "Any thing else, my love?" and he turned to his wife,— "then drive on." He closed the door with a loud sound. Katharine saw Jane's nod, and sweet smile of thanks, and she heard also the Colonel's eager words, as he threw himself back in the carriage, and drew his wife towards him—"Now, at last, my own."

CHAPTER XVII.

"KATE, what are you doing with all those dirty little books?" asked Mrs. Ashton. Katharine was seated at the table with a pile of district tracts before her. "Marking them, mother, to give round; arranging them rather, I should say, for they are marked. Miss Sinclair—Mrs. Forbes, I mean—marked them for me."—"What blunders you do make about names, child," said Mrs. Ashton; "your father told me that it was only yesterday you happened to be in the shop, when Mrs. Sinclair came in, and you asked her if she had heard from Miss Sinclair."—"Not very strange," replied Katharine, "considering that I have known one name so much longer than the other. By the by, mother, Mrs. Sinclair said they were gone into Wales to see some friends, and they would not be at Maplestead for another month."—"It seems a wonderfully long time since they went away," observed Mrs. Ashton; "no one would think it was only this day week."—"And I have not been round with the tracts yet," said Katharine. "I don't know what Mr. Reeves will say to me."—"What you will say to him is the chief matter," replied Mrs. Ashton; "you must tell him that you have been very busy, and that the weather has been very bad, and the only fine day, which was yesterday, I wanted you to go out with me."—"All the more reason why I must go round the district to-day," said Katharine; "you don't want me at home, mother, do you, for any thing?"—"There's the new table-cloth to be hemmed," said Mrs. Ashton; "and I told Peggy Dore, that if she would have the body of my new gown ready by Saturday, you and I would finish the skirt."—"But Susan can hem the table-cloth," said Katharine. "I know she is not busy this afternoon; and if I work hard, mother, this evening, I think I can make up the skirt in time; there is not much to be done to it. To-morrow, you know, John wants you, and me, and Selina too, to go over to Moorlands in Mr. Fowler's chaise; so I can't go any where else then. That farm is beginning to take up a great deal of time," she added, laughing; "it is much worse than the district."—"I don't know that," replied Mrs. Ashton; "the farm is a good way off, and the district is close; but I suppose you must go, Kitty, as you promised Mrs. Forbes you would; only don't be late for tea, and mind if there's any fever your father won't choose you to go near it."

Katharine promised all that was required, and ran up stairs to

put on her bonnet. "It is worse than going to a dentist, I declare," she said, as she came back into the parlour to fetch the tracts and arrange them in the covered basket; "I don't know what in the world I shall say to the people, and I am sure I shall get confused with the names. Let me see: Long-lane comes first; then the houses in Briton's-court, and the south end of Woodgate-street. I never know in Rilworth which is south and which is north. The south end, mother, must be where Anne Crossin lives. I don't know quite now," she continued, looking at some of Jane's memoranda, "whether I am to take in both sides of the way; however, I need not trouble about that to-day; Long-lane will be as much as I can manage in one afternoon, let me work as hard as I may. Good-bye, mother dear, and wish me well through it." And she went up to her mother, and gave her a half merry, half nervous kiss, and set off.

Katharine was obliged to go a little way up High-street to arrive at Long-lane; and on her way she met several people whom she knew, but she did not stop to speak to them. She had a fancy that everybody must be able to tell the contents of the covered brown basket. But there was one of the Miss Lockes stealing into a back street, no doubt, like herself, going into her district. It was singular to find what a bond of sympathy the idea created. She who had known nothing of Miss Locke before, except by sight, felt now that she was quite like a companion and friend. Jemmy Dawes' cottage was the only house, except the alms-houses, that she had ever been into in Long-lane; and that was at the further end, near Briton's-court, and the tracts were numbered in regular order for her to begin at the corner of High-street. Katharine turned out into the line, and stopped before a little green door—a very puzzling door: it did not look quite like the entrance to a poor person's house, and yet it could not well belong to any thing else; and besides, she had been told that some of the houses in Jane's district looked so respectable that no one would imagine they were inhabited by persons in want. She pondered for some seconds, and then, with a sudden bold impulse, tapped at the door. No answer was made, and she lifted the latch. The door opened into a garden; but there was another low open door close by, and within was what looked like a labourer's kitchen. Katharine was hesitating whether to advance or draw back, when a pleasant-featured homely young woman came out of the house; and asked her to walk in; and of course she entered. The young woman did not ask her to sit down in the kitchen, as she expected, but led the way through a stone

passage, opened another door, and calling out, "A lady come to see you, ma'am," ushered Katharine into a long, low room, furnished with great neatness, and lighted by two deep windows, in which were placed stands of geraniums, and a cage with a canary. In this apartment two most respectable elderly females were seated, one knitting, the other reading to her. Katharine's impulse was to rush away, throw aside her tracts, and never attempt district visiting again. "Pray sit down," said the elder of the two respectable ladies, offering her a chair. But Katharine declined; "she had made a mistake," she said; "she hoped they would excuse it, for she had really no intention of intruding." The two ladies looked at her with an expression in their countenances, which, in spite of their amiability, showed surprise and a little nervousness. "I beg your pardon; have you no business?—nothing to say?"—"Nothing at all," was Katharine's reply, dictated by her native boldness; and then recovering herself, she added, with a blush, "I—I am a district visitor."—"Oh!" The elderly ladies understood the mistake in a moment:—she had entered by the back door; there was not the slightest occasion for an apology; would she not sit down and rest? Katharine declined, but she could not go without making an excuse; and she explained that she was a stranger to her work,—this was the first time she had undertaken to go round the district,—she had taken it for Miss Sinclair—Mrs. Forbes. "Oh! then, we have not the pleasure of speaking to Miss Sinclair," said the reading lady, adjusting her spectacles, for a nearer inspection of Katharine's face. "My name is Ashton," replied Katharine; and the two ladies gave a simultaneous start, which made her start also. "Ashton! oh! yes, to be sure; Mr. Ashton, the bookseller's daughter. How stupid of us! But—" and they turned to each other—"did you ever see any thing so grown, and altered?"—"You don't recollect us, my dear," continued the reading lady, "but we recollect you; yes, a good long time ago, we can assure you. I dare say you may have heard our names—Ronaldson, sisters of Harry Ronaldson, of Shene: but ah!" and there came a heavy sigh, "that was before your time."—"You must know our nephew Charlie, though,—I am sure you know him," interrupted the knitting lady; "I have heard him speak of you many a time." The familiar name was the greatest relief possible to Katharine. She had stumbled, then, upon the two Miss Ronaldsons, who had lately, she knew, settled in Rilworth. It was quite a pleasant acquaintance, and would be particularly so for her mother; there would be so many reminiscences of old times to

talk about. She sat down, and her new friends drew their chairs nearer to her, and scarcely waiting for her to speak, began to ask a series of questions, about uncles, and aunts, and cousins, some of whom were dead, whilst others she had never heard of. But the Miss Ronaldsons appeared to have an intimate acquaintance with all; and they could remember her mother's wedding-day, and had a clear recollection of having seen her father in petticoats; and they quickened each other's memories, and recalled so many odd stories, that it seemed as if they would never tire, whilst Katharine listened, and laughed, and every now and then thought of her tract-basket, and at last in despair rose up with desperate resolution, and declared she must go. "No, my dear, not yet; we could not think of letting you go. Priscilla,"—and Miss Ronaldson nodded to her sister, and looked at the corner cupboard. Miss Priscilla quickly took the hint, and proceeded to unlock the cupboard, and produce a bottle of ginger wine, and some sweet cake. "Now, my dear, just one glass; it won't hurt you; it's home-made—Priscilla's making. Prissy, my dear, are you sure that is not gooseberry? We make gooseberry wine, too, my dear Miss Ashton, but the ginger this year happens to be the best. Our nephew Charlie always likes ginger when he comes to see us. Have you seen Charlie lately, my dear?" Katharine took a piece of cake, not liking to refuse, and, after a moment's thought, said she had not seen Mr. Ronaldson for more than three weeks, and she had understood he was gone to London. "So he is, my dear, but he is come back again. He went up to London to see some persons about the land-surveying. The Duke of Lowther recommended him to go. He has been a kind friend to him, has the Duke of Lowther, and Charlie deserves it. We can say that, can't we, Priscilla?"—"Surely," replied Miss Priscilla, who being the stronger-minded of the two, was always required to put her seal to her sister's assertions; "there isn't a better young man in Rilworth, Miss Ashton, than our nephew Charlie; so steady, and so fond of his mother, and so given to his work. I say sometimes that he is quite an example to the young men in these days."—"I hope he will succeed sincerely," said Katharine, a little impatient of this new subject, as she thought again of her tracts. "I know he is a very good young man; every one says so," she added, fearing that she might have appeared cold. "Yes, and every one has good cause to say so," continued Miss Ronaldson; "such a dutiful son as he has been ever since his father's death, and before it, indeed. He never gave his parents a moment's uneasiness at any time. But, my

dear Miss Ashton, must you really go? this is such a very short visit."—"I must come another day, and pay you a visit when I have no business on my hands," said Katharine. "Do, pray; we shall be most happy at any time."—"And we are in your district, remember," said Miss Priscilla.—"Yes, in your district," echoed Miss Ronaldson, "so you must not forget us."—"I am not likely to forget the door," observed Katharine, with a laugh; "it was a most awkward blunder."—"A most fortunate one, my dear, you mean; we have not had such a pleasant little talk, I can't tell the time when; have we, Priscilla?"—"No, indeed; a most pleasant talk," replied Miss Priscilla; "we only hope it will be repeated."—"And if your mother would be kind enough to look in upon us some day, we should be delighted," continued Miss Ronaldson. "Prissy and I don't go out much, especially in cold weather. Prissy is troubled with rheumatism, and I get such bad colds on my chest; don't I, Priscilla?"—"Surely," replied Miss Priscilla; "but can't Deborah carry your basket for you wherever you are going, my dear Miss Ashton?"—"Oh! no, thank you," replied Katharine, "there is nothing heavy in it."—"Ah! so you say," observed Miss Ronaldson; "but you district ladies are wonderful people for taking things about. The people in the lane talk of nothing but of what Miss Sinclair did for them."—"Mrs. Forbes, you mean, sister," said Miss Priscilla, with a reproving nod. "Thank you, Prissy; yes, you are right. Mrs. Forbes, as you say, not Miss Sinclair; but she did go about a great deal, didn't she?"—"Yes," replied Katharine; "a great deal more, I am afraid, than I shall."—"Ah! so you say, my dear; but we shall hear you talked of just the same; shan't we, Prissy? I am glad, though, the basket is not heavy." There might have been a little curiosity in this last observation. Miss Ronaldson certainly fixed her eyes on the covered basket, as if she would fain have had a glimpse into the interior, but Katharine's instinct told her that the little brown books would have required too long an explanation; and therefore, taking advantage of the pause, she retreated, after many hearty good-byes, mingled with assurances from Miss Ronaldson, signed and sealed by Miss Priscilla, that they wished her all success, and had no doubt she would soon be as much talked about as Mrs. Forbes.

District visiting, doubtless, would occupy a very large portion of time, if all visits were like that paid to the Miss Ronaldsons. Katharine had been with them half an hour, and she had only an hour more to bestow on all the people in Long-lane. But the interview had amused and pleased her, and it would be something

to make her father laugh when she went home; and upon the whole it had rather raised her spirits, and given her a stimulus for her work. It was not quite possible to make any more such blunders, for there was no other doubtful door in the lane, and boldly, therefore, she went on.

She knocked at the next door; a clean-looking, fierce-eyed woman, fresh from the washing tub, with her sleeves tucked up to the elbow, came down a wet stone passage leading into a back court, and confronted her. Katharine held out the tract and said, "I think you are Mrs. Mears."—"Yes, my name is Mears."—"I am come to change the tract. I have taken Miss Sinclair's—Mrs. Forbes'—district for the present. She hopes to see you again herself soon."—"Oh!—Cary, what have you done with the tract? here's a lady come for it. Isn't it upon the top shelf?" There was a scuffle in some room behind the passage, and then an untidy-looking girl of about twelve years of age rushed down the passage, thrust the tract into her mother's hand, stared at Katharine, and having satisfied her curiosity, rushed back again. Katharine's business was ended; she could not think of another word to say. Some vague ideas of a speech about wet passages and draughts crossed her mind, but she could not frame any rational sentence. "Good afternoon, I will call again another day," she said. "Good afternoon, Miss," was the answer, in a quick voice, and the instant Katharine was out of the house the door was closed behind her.

Two steps brought her to another door very much like the first; the entrance to the house too was the same—the long passage and the back court: but here she was received by a sickly woman, with a baby in her arms; and as the tract was not to be found, she was asked to walk in, and was shown into a good-sized room, utterly without furniture except two or three broken chairs and a round table; and near the window worked a shoemaker, with a face as sickly as his wife's, and his unshaven black beard making him look yet more ghastly; and on the floor played two little dirty half-clothed children, and on a low stool near the almost empty grate, sat a boy who had injured his leg and could not walk. Very wretched it was, but it gave Katharine an occasion for asking questions and showing sympathy; and the "Thank you, Miss," when she promised to bring the boy a picture-book next time, was encouraging. Not that she could feel she was doing any good; it was all very blind work; but then she was only a beginner, perhaps it would be better by-and-by.

She had only time to go down one side of the lane, but that

seemed enough work both for mind and body for one day. It gave her so much to think of, and there was such an oppressive sense of helplessness upon her. One scene of poverty and distress followed upon another, and how could it be possible to relieve all; especially, what was the good of her trying to do any thing without money, or talent, or even time? And if there was not poverty, there was generally an indifference of manner which repelled her, and made her feel that the people wanted to be talked to and lectured into good manners. Jane had told her that Long-lane and Briton's-court were the worst parts of her district, and that she would find some very nice people in Woodgate-street, but that did not help her very much at the moment. She went home feeling that she had not done half she intended, that she had undertaken a work quite beyond her powers, and that if Mr. Reeves expected her to be of any use to him in the parish he would find himself utterly mistaken. One thing, however, struck her as she went into the parlour in her own home: how comfortable it looked! how bright the fire was! how nice it was to sit down to work again! And that evening the hour at tea was particularly pleasant; Mr. Ashton was so amused with the story of her stumbling upon the Miss Ronaldsons, and Mrs. Ashton promised to go and call upon them, and asked Katharine some questions about the other people she had seen, and agreed that Susan should put by the scraps for the shoemaker's family. Katharine was very light-hearted when she went to bed, but it could not have been on account of her district, because that, she had made up her mind, was to be a perpetual burden.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KATHARINE had time the next day to hurry down to the shoemaker's cottage with an old picture-book, and return just in time to be ready for the drive to Moorlands. Mr. Fowler's double-seated chaise was at the door, and John and Selina were seated in it. Selina was in the front seat, which seemed a little thoughtless in both of them, for the back seat was cramped, and would be very uncomfortable for Mrs. Ashton; but then John and Selina were in love, and a certain amount of selfishness is always allowed to persons under such circumstances. Selina was so very gay in her dress that Katharine was not sorry to be spared the necessity

of sitting side by side with her, in contrast; and Mrs. Ashton, in her extreme good-nature, did not care at all about the back seat, and was only glad, as she said, that the young people should have it all their own way. She looked very proud and smiling, and bowed to all her acquaintance as they drove down the street, and observed to Katharine that, after all, she must own there was some good in the marriage, for they did not get a drive every day. Katharine was only too willing to discover any advantages she could, and quite agreed that it was a delightful afternoon, and much pleasanter to be driving over to Moorlands than going in and out of the cottages in Long-lane.

Moorlands was on the Maplestead road, a little to the right, about a quarter of a mile beyond the upper lodge gate. Katharine looked up the long beech avenue, and thought of the day when she, Selina, and Julia Madden, had met Colonel Forbes and Jane at the entrance. How rapidly events had crowded upon each other since then! how fixed Jane's fate was! and John and Selina's almost equally so! and yet circumstances had glided on very smoothly, one bringing another in a measure unperceived. So it might be, so it must be with herself, and with every one—all were travelling on to something important as regarded this life, even without the thought of another. She wondered what it would be in her own case.

"You have been to Moorlands, haven't you Kitty?" said John, turning round, and interrupting her reverie. "No, never, not close that is: I have seen it passing the lane."—"Well, there it is, through the trees; you can just catch the chimneys. The Colonel and we shall be near neighbours, eh, Selly?"—"Yes, it will be quite pleasant," said Selina. "Jane Forbes and I"—Katharine could not possibly resist touching her arm: "Now, really, Selina, you must not say that. Nobody calls married women by their Christian names."—"I beg your pardon, Katharine, I know a great many people who do."—"Then they must be relations, or persons who have known them intimately before," replied Katharine; "Colonel Forbes won't like it—indeed he won't. John you mustn't let her do it."—"I am not going to call her Jane to her face," observed Selina; "but if I speak of her behind her back I shall call her what I choose, and so I must beg, Katharine, that you won't interfere."—"What is the matter, my dear?" asked Mrs. Ashton, innocently, as, after straining her eyes to discover the chimneys of Moorlands, she sank back in her seat, and awoke to the consciousness that something was amiss. "Nothing, dear mother, nothing; only Selina and I differed a little. I am afraid

you are not comfortable," she added, trying to distract her mother's attention and her own. "Oh, yes, my dear, thank you, quite — there's plenty of room. John, don't you upset us round the corner." There was no fear of that. John was a most expert charioteer, and took them not only safe round the corner, but along a very rough, bad lane, full of stones and ruts, which made Mrs. Ashton keep her eyes fixed upon the ground in order to give warning of all danger beforehand, and caused one or two faint shrieks from Selina, and consequent soothing words and fond attentions from John. Katharine was never timid in a carriage, and she had perfect faith in her brother's power of driving, so she had full leisure to occupy herself with looking at Maplestead, of which they had a very good view as they drove along the side of the park. It was a red brick house, with stone facings, low and long: the wings were modern, and had large sash windows; the centre was old, and there the windows were smaller and the mullions very heavy. There was a good deal of ornament about it, but of what kind Katharine could not quite see, only she remembered having been told that the Clare family, of whom Colonel Forbes had bought it, had carved the figure of a lion, their family crest, wherever room could possibly be found for it. The sun was shining pleasantly on the smooth lawn, and though the season was late the flower beds were gay with colour, and Maplestead, with its noble park and its wide-spreading trees, looked a very bright home on that autumn afternoon. But Katharine could not fancy Jane Sinclair its mistress: it was too large for her, too stately, too much shut out from the rest of the neighbourhood; and to live there year after year with Colonel Forbes! — Katharine internally shuddered at the thought. "Very foolish," as she said to herself afterwards; "no doubt if she had been brought up like Miss Sinclair, she would feel like her. It was only because she was not accustomed to grandeur and grand people, that she did not fancy them."

Yet there was certainly a relief in driving up to Moorlands in spite of its associations. It was a substantial looking place; the house old but comfortable, and just beginning to be overrun with creepers: in front was a small lawn, at one side a kitchen garden at the back, and at the other side, a farm-yard. Affluence, and what people call respectability, were stamped upon it, and Mrs. Ashton was much pleased, and thought it only too much of a place for a beginning, and Selina really did hope that something could be made of it. As they were all satisfied, Katharine could not help being so; in fact, just at that moment she did not feel that

she had much cause to be the reverse. Now that the marriage was really settled, she was beginning to take it, according to her custom, in its best point of view, and Moorlands certainly was a most favourable spot from which to regard it. It would be a very pleasant change for her father, who was so fond of the country; and when her mother was troubled with head-ache, as she was sometimes, it might really be of service to her health to have a little fresh pure air; and the house must be quite large enough to hold them all, if they wished to be there together. What she feared was, like her mother, that it might be rather too much of a place for a beginning.

John helped them out of the chaise, and walked into the house with the air of a master. "A very good parlour, you see, mother, and a capital kitchen and offices, and as many bed-rooms as we shall want. We might build on more behind, the Colonel says, if necessary." — "Build! my dear," repeated Mrs. Ashton, who had a virtuous horror of bricks and mortar. — "If necessary, mother; and it might be. Selina doesn't think she shall be able to do without a drawing-room, and if so, that will take the best room upstairs." — "Of course I must have a drawing-room," said Selina; "how am I to receive my friends else? and what is mamma to do when she comes to stay with me?" A conclusive argument! Mrs. Ashton was silent, because she did not know what to say; Katharine, because she did not think it desirable to interfere. So they went upstairs to see the rooms, and the best, the only really good room, was immediately marked by Selina for the drawing-room, and she made John take out his pocket-book and make a memorandum of the furniture which would be wanted, including, of course, a round table, a chiffonier, a book-case, and a sofa. "Her own piano," she said, "would be brought from home and would fill up the space that was left very well." Katharine was anxious herself to go over the offices, the kitchen, scullery, pantry, dairy, &c. She felt these to be much more important than the drawing-room; but Selina kept John so long upstairs settling where every thing was to be placed, that she had not patience to wait for them, and she and her mother went down stairs together. John had called the offices good, but they did not strike Katharine as being so. They were small, and some of the out-houses were a good deal out of repair. Katharine made notes herself of what she remarked, meaning to show them to John or her father, when she was alone with them. It seemed to her that the bargain would not be as great as she had at first imagined. She believed that John was to pay a diminished rent on condition of undertaking the repairs. This might have

been all very well if the repairs had been within moderate compass ; but it certainly seemed to her that there were dangerous temptations to make unnecessary improvements, from the fact of so much requiring to be done. She had a little misgiving too about her father—he was so very fond of work of the kind ; and Selina would be sure to urge John even beyond his own inclinations in the way of extravagance. The idea was so strong in her mind, that when at last John and Selina came down stairs, she ventured to point out to them the state of the premises and suggest whether it might not be as well to reconsider the agreement with Colonel Forbes, since it was not quite concluded, and be contented to pay a larger rent if Colonel Forbes would put the place in order.

John seemed inclined to listen to the idea ; but he had no sooner said that it was something at least to be thought of, when Selina interposed, “ What ! leave the alterations to Colonel Forbes ; let him do just as he might wish !—it was mere folly and absurdity. How was he to tell what would be wanted ? And he would be sure to do it in a shabby, skimping way. And then the increased rent would be such a burden, so much more than they could afford ! She was sure if such a thing were proposed, the place must be given up ; in fact, it would be quite impossible to undertake it ; they could not attempt it ; it would be ruin : ” and tears rushed to her eyes, and even fell down her cheeks, very much to Katharine’s discomfiture, and to John’s distress. Again Katharine blamed herself for making wise suggestions at unwise times, and to unwise people. The same thing said to her father might have been really useful. She had a good deal to learn in that way, for, with her natural impetuosity of disposition, it was very difficult to be silent when an idea was pressing upon her mind.

Selina recovered herself after a little sympathy from Mrs. Ashton, who thought it hard she should be thwarted in a matter which seemed to her of slight consequence, and a good deal of soothing from John, accompanied by a promise that she should have it all her own way ; and they went out into the garden. It was, strictly speaking, a kitchen-garden, old-fashioned and formal, with an abundant supply of cabbages, carrots, lettuces, and other vegetables, and a moderate space left for flowers in the front borders. Mrs. Ashton was charmed with it ; Katharine thought it the best thing she had yet seen at Moorlands ; and Selina acknowledged it would be all very well if they could plant it out, but as it was it was merely a desight ; and she called John away from the inspection of the vegetables to plan some flower-beds for the front lawn.

"Selina thinks Moorlands is what people call a villa," said Katharine to her mother; "I always thought it a farm-house."—"Ah! that's just at first, my dear, she will know better by-and-bye. But it won't do to cross her just at the beginning; and, besides, it will vex John." That was the important point, kept, as people say the real business of a lady's letter is, for the postscript. Katharine was quite in the minority, and it was a considerable trial to her, feeling herself, as she did, in the right. But it was a much greater trial to be put aside in her brother's affections. With all his faults, he had always hitherto been very fond of her, and he was so still, she was sure; but he had no thought for her; he did not care whether she gave her opinion or not; he did not notice if she was present or absent. He made Selina sit down, because he thought she would be tired; but it did not seem to enter his head that Katharine might be tired, too. Katharine was not of a jealous disposition; but it was not in human nature to be so suddenly thrust out of her natural place, and not to feel it. She walked about with her mother, and left John and Selina to themselves, feeling very unhappy. She thought she could have borne it if Selina had been less silly; but she was mistaken. If Selina had been perfect it would have been quite impossible to know that she was second where she had once been first, and not to suffer. And then it seemed so wrong, so unkind, unsympathising, selfish,—and her mother did not seem to care at all! she was only glad that John should be happy! Why should not a sister's feelings be the same as a mother's? Katharine began to lecture herself very severely, as she walked up and down the centre walk in the kitchen-garden, waiting till John and Selina were ready to go over the farm-buildings. Mrs. Ashton busied herself in gathering a few autumn flowers to take back with them, and Katharine began to do the same; but she could not go on very long, her thoughts interfered with her work. First came the self-scolding; then a kind of apology and explanation; then a wonder whether her feelings were unusual; then a little something like envy of John and Selina—not envy of them, but of their happiness, of that pleasant feeling of being all in all to each other. She would not change with Selina, or with Miss Sinclair, or with any married person she had ever known; she had never seen the person she would like to marry; she scarcely knew herself what she would wish him to be like, she had thought so little about it; but if it were possible to meet with any one quite,—in every respect,—faultless in fact, then it seemed as if it might be a happy life, very happy. She felt that she could make a good wife. She could love, yes, most deeply —

there was a rush of feeling at the vision she had conjured up, which told her that the well-spring of her affections had never yet been reached; and she could honour, she must honour,—without it there could be no love; and she could obey,—in spite of her theory, that it might be well for a woman not to spoil her husband, she could yield her own will cheerfully and trustingly; only—she smiled to herself as she woke up suddenly from her reverie, and felt herself thrown back upon the stern fact, that the being of whom she had been dreaming was not to her knowledge in existence, or likely to be so.

“Mother, dear,”—and she went up to Mrs. Ashton, and took from her the flowers she had been collecting,—“had we not better put these into the house, and then go and hurry John and Selina? We shall be late home else.” Mrs. Ashton looked at her watch:—“So we shall, I declare; it’s past four;—just go and call them, my dear.”—“Won’t you come too, mother?” Katharine was beginning to fear that she might gain the character of a mar-plot if she came in their way often. Mrs. Ashton walked towards the front of the house.—“I wonder what they are at.—Just see how John is striding up and down.”—“Measuring, I suppose,” said Katharine; “but it can’t be a flower-bed.”—No, it was not a flower-bed, but a green-house;—a green-house which might be built on close to the parlour, and might be heated by a flue from the parlour chimney, and might be put up for twenty pounds, and in fact would make the place quite another thing,—quite a genteel country house, as Selina observed. “A green-house and a farm-yard, Selly, how absurd!” and Katharine laughed heartily one moment, and grew quite serious the next. Mistake the third! Poor Katharine! how often she was to repent that day of her hasty words. Neither John nor Selina deigned to reply to her, but went on planning and talking, as if the idea was the most feasible possible, till Mrs. Ashton insisted upon their going round the farm-yard, if they meant to go at all, since she was determined not to keep her husband waiting for his tea. Selina was too tired then to move a step further, and proposed to wait in the parlour whilst the rest walked round. John offered his arm to his mother, and told Katharine not to keep behind. He seemed now to like having them with him; perhaps he felt that the farm-yard and the farm-buildings were more to their taste than Selina’s. He talked a great deal of his schemes, and of what he hoped Colonel Forbes would do for him in the course of a year or two, and how many labourers would be required, and how he should pay them; and as Katharine listened with interest, he grew quite affectionate in his manner, and promised

her that she should come and be his bailiff when she was tired of the shop ; and Katharine, in the simple confidence of her own affections, thought herself more wicked than ever, because she had been jealous. She did not perceive that "I," not "Thou," was still, as it had always been, the first person of importance in John's mind.

The horse had been put up in the farm-stable. John went to find the man who had taken it from him ; but he had gone away, and only a stupid carter's boy was left about the place. John gave his orders that the horse should be put in, and the chaise brought round to the front door, and then returned to Selina, from whom he had already, in his own opinion, been an unconscionably long time absent. She was engaged in discussing with Mrs. Ashton and Katharine what colour would be best for the furniture of the parlour and drawing-room ; and John joined willingly in the conversation, and did not notice, as Katharine did, that the business of putting the horse into the carriage took double the time that was necessary. The chaise came to the door at last, and they all seated themselves ; and John took the whip in his hand, and with a munificent air tossed sixpence to the boy and drove off. "The chaise shakes a great deal, Kitty," said Mrs. Ashton, as they turned into the lane. "I never knew any thing go so oddly."—"Only the ruts, mother," replied Katharine ; "John will do more wisely in spending his money in mending the road than in building a greenhouse."—"Hey? yes, what did you say?" asked Mrs. Ashton, looking anxiously over the side of the carriage. "It does go very oddly ; John, what is the matter with the horse?"—"Nothing, mother, only it is a desperate road. I declare the Colonel is a fortunate man in having his farm taken with such a break-neck drive to it. Now, take care of yourselves, hold fast," and down went one wheel into a deep rut ; and heavily, and with a very strange movement, the horse dragged the chaise on a few yards, while John looked over into the road as his mother had done ; and then bent forward to glance at the harness ; and as the figure of a man crossed the high road at the further end of the lane, called out, "Holloa ! come here, will you, my good fellow."—"It's Charles Ronaldson," said Katharine, laughing ; "he won't know you, if you call him good fellow."—"He is a good fellow, I hope," said John ; "he will be a good fellow to us if he helps out of this mess.—Here, Selly, take the reins ;" and he stopped the horse and jumped out to overtake Charles, who had not heard his call. "What's the matter, John ? John, what's the matter ? Oh ! he's going on," screamed Selina. "Of course he is," said Katharine,

quietly ; "you have dropped the reins." Selina put up her hands to her eyes, and before Katharine could speak again there was a great jerk, and down came both the horse and the chaise, and Mrs. Ashton, Selina, and Katharine were thrown out upon the bank at the side of the road. Selina lay upon the ground crying out in piteous accents that she was killed, and Mrs. Ashton seemed at first doubtful of the same fact ; but they were neither of them in as bad a condition as Katharine, who had fallen under them, and bruised her arm against a stone. Even she, however, was not materially hurt, and when Charles Ronaldson and John came up to them she was quite ready to laugh at her own share in the misfortune, and help to quiet the nerves of Mrs. Ashton and Selina. The chaise was the chief object of attention, even to John ; it was much scratched, and one of the wheels was broken. This was a most uncomfortable story to carry back to his future father-in-law, and poor John looked not a little disturbed in his mind. Selina, however, had no share in the blame ; it was all laid to the charge of the stupid carter's boy, who had pretended, John said, to harness the horse, when he knew no more about it than he did of catching a rhinoceros. The horse was raised with the assistance of Charles Ronaldson, and then it was agreed that the chaise should be taken to the farm and left there till it was settled what should be done with it, whilst the horse was to be led into Rilworth ; and so, after a little delay in dragging back the chaise to Moorlands, the procession set off, John leading the horse, and Selina walking by his side, whilst Charles joined Mrs. Ashton and Katharine.

It was not a very long walk, and but for the misadventure it would have been a very pleasant one. Charles was not as shy now as he had been when last they met ; the downfall of the chaise had broken the ice ; and they talked about Moorlands, and Maplestead, and Colonel Forbes, and Jane, and the district, and the Miss Ronaldsons, so that there was no lack of subjects for discourse. Katharine still, however, had the larger share in the conversation ; not because she wished it, but because she could not help it. When Charles did say any thing, it seemed always with a view to bringing out her opinions and feelings rather than expressing his own. He was chiefly communicative upon the subject of his aunts, of whom he seemed particularly fond, quite strangely so, as Mrs. Ashton afterwards remarked, for a young man. "They were such good people," he said, "so thoroughly religious and kind-hearted, and had done so much for him ; he should never have been in the position he then was if it had not been for them." — "I thought the Duke of Lowther had been your great friend, Mr.

Ronaldson," said Katharine. — "My largest friend; I don't know that I can say my greatest, except in a worldly sense. I don't mean that he has not helped me far beyond what I could possibly have expected; but there are some favours which can only be conferred by relations—which we can only accept from relations. Don't you understand that, Miss Ashton?" — "Yes," said Katharine, "that is, I think I do; but I don't know much about receiving favours except from my father and mother." — "It is something to learn in life," said Charles thoughtfully, "and it takes a long time to learn it; but it was never difficult with my aunts, even when at one time, before my father's affairs were settled, they gave my mother and me a home, and shared their small income with us. The obligation was never painful. Favours bestowed from affection, Miss Ashton, are very different from favours bestowed from duty." — "That must have been twelve years ago that you were living with them, Charlie," said Mrs. Ashton; "you must not mind my calling you 'Charlie,' it comes so natural." — "I should be very sorry if it did not," he replied. "As one grows older, one's Christian name becomes much more valuable, because one only hears it from old friends." — "I don't like being called by my Christian name unless people know me very well indeed," said Katharine; "and I never can bear it's being done unless I am asked first." — "I can't fancy any person's calling you by your Christian name without asking," said Charles, "unless——" He paused, — "Unless what?" asked Katharine. — "Unless it were to come out without their meaning it—knowing it, that is; should you be very angry then?" His voice had sunk into that deep under tone which Katharine had once before remarked. It frightened her a little; it made her think she did not understand him, and yet he seemed very simple and plain in all he said. "I should be angry with any thing I thought a liberty," she said. "I learnt that from my mother. Don't you remember, mother, telling me one day that I was not to let George Andrews go on calling me Katharine to my face? It was very awkward stopping him, but I did manage it. I think it was by saying something which came round to him.— Oh! I remember, I said to Selina Fowler that it was not like a gentleman; and he took the hint directly, for he can't bear not being considered a gentleman." — "He is a very good-natured young man," said Mrs. Ashton; "I don't know any one who takes a hint better." — "Then he must be the essence of good-nature," exclaimed Katharine; "I can bear any thing said plainly, but I can't endure hints." — "Neither can I," said Charles, quietly. "Miss Ashton, if I ever have any thing—

to say to you, will you promise to forgive me if I say it very openly." Katharine was thrown back again into awe, his manner was so very strange; but she rallied herself to reply, "Oh, yes, say any thing in the world you choose; I can bear a good deal, can't I, mother dear? when," she added, laughing, "it is put in the way I like."—"Only not what you would call a liberty," said Charles.—"I don't think I should be likely to call any thing you would say a liberty," replied Katharine, simply. He turned very pale. Katharine scarcely heard the words, "Thank you."—"Kate is very good in the way of bearing things," observed Mrs. Ashton. "There are not many young girls in Rilworth that would submit to be kept in order like her, but that was the good early teaching of Miss Richardson. I must say that for her, she made all her girls obedient, if she did nothing else."—"But she did a great deal else," observed Katharine; "half the good—that is, if I have any good—I mean half the notions I have of what I should wish to be—came from Miss Richardson. She was so honest-hearted, mother, was not she? and she did all she did so thoroughly. I remember when as a child I used to go to church and hear about a straight and narrow way to Heaven, I always used to fancy that I saw it a long distance before me, with a bright light at the end, and that Miss Richardson was walking along it; and I used to long so that I could get into it like her and never wander out again." Charles Ronaldson was silent. They had reached the turnpike-gate at Rilworth, and there his road home separated from Katharine's. "Won't you come and drink tea with us, Charlie?" asked Mrs. Ashton. "Mr. Ashton would be most glad to see you."—"Thank you, thank you;—no, thank you; not to-night, I am engaged." He shook hands and hurried away, and then turned back to say, "You will go and see my aunts sometimes, I hope, Miss Ashton;" but he did not wait for a reply.

"Such a very strange person!" said Katharine; "but, mother, I like him better, I think, than any one else in Rilworth; only I never know what he means."

CHAPTER XIX.

KATHARINE saw a good deal of Charles Ronaldson after that day. She met him often at his aunts', and he and John grew rather intimate, and frequently went over to Moorlands together to talk

about farm matters, with which Charles was much better acquainted than John; and this was an excuse for his coming back to drink tea, and have a little more conversation with Mr. Ashton. Katharine liked his being there, though she did not feel, as the phrase is, "that she got on with him." She never could quite prevent a certain feeling of awe; and this feeling increased as she knew more of him. When his shyness was overcome, and he brought out his opinions boldly, he struck her more and more as being something unlike other people,—in a degree superior to them. He had a way of putting things upon high grounds, suggesting high motives, which sometimes actually surprised her,—it was so unlike what she was accustomed to hear. He did not agree with her father and John, in a great many things, and she sometimes wondered that he could choose to be as much with them as he was. At last it crossed her mind that perhaps he liked to be with her; that was after he had stayed very late one evening, when Selina Fowler was drinking tea with them also, and Selina had laughed at her, and put the notion into her head; and though Katharine was angry at the time, she could not in a moment put aside the thought. But she did her best, and lectured herself most heartily and sincerely, and remembered how silly she should think such fancies in any one else. As for attentions, Charles Ronaldson never scarcely showed her any; there was not really any ground for the idea beyond Selina's folly; and Katharine being determined to treat the disease rationally, as she thought, would not allow herself to be at all shy, or awkward, or in any way self-conscious, which had been her first impulse; but resolved to go and see the Miss Ronaldsons that very day, as she had promised, before Selina had teased her, and not to think whether or not she should meet Charles there; and if he came in in the evening, she determined to talk to him just the same as usual. Only one thing she resolved to be careful about, she would never put herself in the power of Selina's gossip, nor that of any other person.

She had once or twice lately met Charles at his aunts', and he had walked home with her. This should not be again,—not for his sake, nor for hers; the action she felt sure was as indifferent to him as it was to her, but she would not have her own name bandied about from one to the other, and she could not in justice allow his to be so either. Happily he was going to leave Rilworth in another month, to enter upon his regular business, and then nothing more could by any possibility be said.

Her district business was now proceeding in regular train, and

so far it was less burdensome. She knew generally what she had to do, and could arrange how it was to be done; but it was oppressive to her in many ways, which she had not calculated upon. It opened her eyes to so much evil, so much irremediable suffering; and, notwithstanding Mr. Reeves' assurance that the great responsibility rested upon him, and not upon her, she could not give herself the relief which he intended to offer. Certainly he was the clergyman, and answerable for the spiritual welfare of his people—he was the person bound to advise and direct; and she might, and indeed would, be going out of her province in attempting any thing of the kind. But Mr. Reeves could not be everywhere at all times; work as hard as he and his curate could, it was impossible, with such a parish upon their hands, to enter minutely into the affairs of every family; and there were cases of over-indulged children, and careless mothers, and vain, flighty daughters continually brought before Katharine's notice, which she did not in the least know how to deal with. Poor people told her their stories, and seemed to think, that because she could give them district tickets, therefore she could help them in their other needs; and now and then, if the matter was very trifling, she ventured to give an opinion; and at other times it seemed advisable to go and talk to Mr. Reeves. But Mr. Reeves was often out, often excessively engaged with business which could not possibly be put aside. Katharine made the experiment two or three times; but when she had said what she had to say, the difficulty brought before him seemed so trifling, that she was ashamed of herself for having troubled him with it. He told her one day that she must learn to give an independent opinion in small matters; and she knew what he meant. He certainly had not time to decide every question that might arise in every household in Rilworth, and yet the point must be settled, and the responsibility must rest upon the person who helped to settle it; and so Katharine was thrown back upon herself and her own judgment, and her conscience was troubled, and her mind perplexed. Her mother was an assistance to her in some ways. Mrs. Ashton had a good deal of worldly sense naturally, and she had, moreover, the experience of fifty years to guide her, and in cases simply involving prudence and ordinary judgment she could direct Katharine very usefully; but she did not understand any of the more refined or abstruse difficulties which sometimes came in Katharine's way; and for these she most frequently applied to the Miss Ronaldsons. They had worked for years amongst the poor in a country parish, where the clergyman had not been at all active. They could understand,

therefore, the feelings of the poor ; and this was Katharine's great need. Very often she did not know what to say, or if she knew, she could not tell how to say it. Little suggestions even, as to the treatment of invalids, — giving fresh air, — keeping them quiet, — were difficulties to Katharine, because she did not know how far she might venture to interfere ; and if it came to the point of telling a mother that she ought to send her boys to school, or keep her daughters at home, she would worry herself for several days, because she was not quite certain whether it was her business to advise. If she might have contented herself with giving out district tickets, and changing tracts, her work would have been easy ; but Katharine was beginning to open her eyes to the fact, that we cannot, even if we would, escape the necessity of influencing our fellow-creatures, either for good or for evil ; and life was in consequence becoming more serious and oppressive. It was a comfort though to feel that she was gaining experience, and so, it was to be hoped, improving. Notwithstanding her dread of interference, she might have begun too boldly, even from her very dread of being a moral coward, but for a hint from Miss Ronaldson, who said one day, in her very kind voice, when Katharine had been complaining of some rudeness she had experienced : — “ You see, my dear, what the poor people want is friendliness, and we cannot become friends all of a sudden ; except, you know, when people have known about each other very long, as Prissy and I knew you. After a time, they will come to know you, and the look of your face will be natural to them, and then they will take better what you have to say ; but I don't think English poor people ever fancy having folks coming into their cottages, and giving them advice suddenly. At least that was what Prissy and I found when we lived in the country ; didn't we, Prissy ? ” Katharine acted upon this suggestion, and tried to make herself, as Miss Ronaldson said, “ natural,” before she took upon herself, even in a slight degree, the office of an adviser.

Mr. Reeves also gave her very substantial comfort, though it was more for the general practice of life, than for any particular occasion. He called one day with his wife and found Katharine grave and almost out of spirits ; the cares of the district were pressing upon her, so that she was almost tempted to give up her work, and own it a failure. “ She was sure,” she said, “ that she did no good ; the people took advantage of her, and deceived her. The little she could give in the way of money would be given just the same, whether she had the district or not ; and her mother would be very glad to provide broth or pudding occasionally, as

she had been accustomed to do lately ; but she was sure it required a more experienced person to undertake such a duty, and therefore when Mrs. Forbes came home she could not help thinking it would be better to give up her share, and trust that some one else would be found who knew better what to do." Mr. Reeves listened very patiently whilst Katharine said this, and then asked her whether she was in earnest. "Quite," was Katherine's reply ; "that is," she added, with her usual candour, "quite earnest in wishing it, though I don't know that I should entirely like to do it." Mr. Reeves smiled. "Do you know, Miss Ashton, I have had the same thoughts in my mind lately about my clerical duties?" Katharine stared. "Yes," he said, "I feel myself utterly incompetent ; notwithstanding my long experience, I am constantly failing, and making blunders. I really see very little fruit from my labours, and therefore it is natural to conclude that I am unfitted for my office, and shall do better to resign it."—"But,—but," Katharine hesitated, and was very much afraid of being impertinent. "Pray say what is in your mind," he continued.—"I don't quite see, sir, how a clergyman can give up his office."—"Once a clergyman always a clergyman, you mean?" he replied. "Precisely the difficulty which stops me." Katharine looked relieved. "Then you are not going to leave Rilworth, sir?"—"Not just yet, I only mentioned my feelings that you might understand I could sympathise with yours." There was a lurking smile upon his lips, which puzzled Katharine extremely. "If I were a clergyman," she said, "I should know that I could not give up my duties." The smile vanished, and Mr. Reeves became serious in an instant. "And though you are not a clergyman, my dear Miss Ashton, are you really more at liberty? There is not indeed the same solemn vow binding you down, but there is an equally clear outward call,—the solemn ordering of Providential circumstances, which have placed you in your present position, led you to your work, opened the way for it, put you in the way of beginning it."—"Yes, if I were fitted for it," said Katharine.—"Then it is in your power to change the hearts of your fellow-creatures ; you can yourself make them all that they ought to be?"—"No, no," exclaimed Katharine, "it is exactly that which troubles me,—that I cannot do so."—"Neither can I," said Mr. Reeves ; "I may preach, and talk, and labour from morning till night, and from night till morning, but I can do nothing. Yet you tell me I should do wrong in giving up my work."—"Yes," said Katharine, thoughtfully, "I see ; one's failings ought not to dishearten one so much."—"No ; and if we

were thoroughly humble, thoroughly imbued with a sense of our own helplessness, they would not do so. It is the one great lesson of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, that means are nothing. It is taught us continually in the history of the Judges, and the Kings; and in the most striking way. The prayer of Asa is a prayer for us in every undertaking." Katharine did not at the moment recollect the prayer of Asa, but she determined to look for it when Mr. Reeves was gone. "You must go on with your work, cheerfully and hopefully, my dear Miss Ashton," continued Mr. Reeves, in a lighter tone; "not troubling yourself with how much you do but in what way you do it; making up your mind to commit blunders, and to see little or no fruit; remembering that, if you were to give up your district at once, and never again to take upon yourself such a burden, the responsibility would not be one iota lessened, but rather a thousandfold increased. It is what I long to make the people of Rilworth feel," he continued. "The excuse meets me at every turn, with regard to district visiting, and the schools, and the duties of sponsors, and numberless other claims of the kind. Again and again people say to me, 'I would, but I am afraid of the responsibility—I am not competent;' as if we were any of us competent! Depend upon it, if we will take the burden, which God in His Providence brings us, He will bear it for us; if we will not take it, it will one day fall upon us and crush us."—"But there are a good many district visitors," said Katharine. "Not so many as are wanted," replied Mr. Reeves; "the districts are a great deal too large, that is one reason why they are so burdensome. And then we want men; and they are much more difficult to find than women—they have more regular daily employment, and I am afraid very often they have not quite the same spirit. Young Ronaldson is the only volunteer we have had since I have been here. I think I am correct, my dear," he added, turning to his wife. "Yes, the others belonged to the society before," replied Mrs. Reeves; "but he has been an incalculable help; unfortunately, he will be going soon."—"He is an example of what I want to make others see," continued Mr. Reeves, "that it is right to do whatever we can without nice calculations as to time and the power of continuance."—"When Ronaldson offered himself to me as a visitor in Pebble Street—which I need not say to you, Miss Ashton, is the worst street in Rilworth—all his plans and prospects were uncertain—he knew that he might be called away at any moment; but he heard that the street was left, that in fact it was so bad no one would undertake it, and he came to me and told me exactly how he was cir-

cumstanced, and said he could not promise to give up any amount of time, because he had other duties to be considered ; but he offered to do what he could.”—“And that has been quite as much, if not more than any one else,” said Mrs. Reeves.—“Yes, and the advantage is, that he has paved the way for others ; the street is a bad street, and will remain bad, I fear ; but some of the very worst evils have been removed, and the next person who may have it will have comparatively a light task. I really know no one whose help I have valued more than Charles Ronaldson’s,” he continued. “It was just one of those cases in which a man might have made such a fair excuse to himself for doing nothing ; actually not an inhabitant of the town, —here only for a time,—for his mother only took lodgings in Rilworth till his London plans were fixed—all his prospects at a distance, and really feeling the necessity of studying for his business. I am sure I never should have blamed him for refusing to assist me ; in fact, it never entered my head that it would be right to ask him.” It was very pleasant to Katharine to hear this praise ; it made her feel that she was right in liking Charles Ronaldson better than any one else in Rilworth ; but it rather increased her awe of him. She wondered also how it was she had never heard of his having a district, till she recollected that his name was not down in the last printed report, and that he himself was not likely to mention the circumstance.

“And now,” said Mrs. Reeves, “having given you a lecture upon the subject of duties, I hope, Miss Ashton, that Mr. Reeves is going to propose himself the business which was partly our object in calling upon you to-day. I really feel he ought to do it.”—Katharine’s heart sank. Was she to be made superintendent of the Sunday-school ? Or what other overpowering dignity was to be thrust upon her ?—“Can you cover books,” said Mr. Reeves, bluntly.—Katharine looked surprised.—“I hope so, sir ; I don’t know that there is any thing very difficult in it.”—“But can you cover a great many books ?” said Mrs. Reeves, laughing ; “little troublesome books—and can you go on working a whole evening ?”—“Without once leaving off and saying your fingers ache ?” added Mr. Reeves.—Katharine could not quite promise, but she said she had had a good deal of practice.—“Just the very thing,” said Mr. Reeves. “Then will you come and drink tea with us to-morrow evening, and help Mrs. Reeves and your fellow-labourers in the Rilworth districts to cover and mark a large set of new tracts, and some volumes for the lending library ?”—“Yes, indeed,” Katharine said, with a bright smile ; “she should like it

very much indeed. At what hour should she come?"—"At seven, if that will suit you," replied Mrs. Reeves; "and please bring with you the largest and least spoilable pair of scissors you possess."—"And remember," said Mr. Reeves, "that you are to be very grateful to me for providing you with the tracts. I have heard nothing but complaints of the old ones for the last three months."—"And not quite undeserved, my dear," said Mrs. Reeves. "A great many of them are uncommonly dry, and all wonderfully dirty." Mr. Reeves laughed.

"It was Mrs. Forbes who put you up to that," he replied. "She always read her tracts, which I am quite sure you never do."—"Then we shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow at seven," said Mrs. Reeves, shaking hands with Katharine. "And don't let your father and mother scold us for taking you away from them," added Mr. Reeves. "Will you, now I think of it, ask your father if he has had any tidings of the book I asked him to get for me? He promised he would be on the look out for it, and I have been intending to call every day and hear if he had received any tidings of it."—"And pray tell Mrs. Ashton," said Mrs. Reeves, "that she need not trouble about your returning home at night, because there will be two or three of our party coming from your part of the town."—"Again there was a cordial good-bye; but Mr. Reeves could not help returning to say: "I don't know, Miss Ashton, whether you have heard a name which our friends on the opposite side of the Atlantic sometimes give to joint working parties—I heard it from a cousin of mine who had been a good deal among them—they call them 'Bees.' So now I give you a formal invitation to a Parish Bee, and remember you are punctual."

CHAPTER XX.

KATHARINE was quite punctual. She entered Mr. Reeves' drawing-room exactly as the town-clock struck seven. Yet she was not the first arrival. Betsy Carter was there before her, and very busy, so it seemed, for the books and tracts were laid upon the table, and she was sorting them. Katharine doubted, however, afterwards, whether it was not a self-imposed task, for Mr. Reeves, after shaking hands with her, turned round, and said with a very little impatience of manner: "Thank you, Miss Carter, for troubling yourself with those books, but I think I understand their arrangement best as they are."—Miss Carter

left the books ; but she wanted extremely to find out whether there was a sufficient quantity of coarse brown paper provided, and insisted upon knowing whether Katharine had brought her scissors. She appeared thoroughly at home, and evidently did not seem to think it in the least necessary to say "sir," to Mr. Reeves. Katharine disliked her more than ever, and was quite glad when some more arrivals threw her into the background. They were to have tea first in the dining-room ; but it was not quite ready, so there was about a quarter of an hour's conversation beforehand. Katharine felt a little stiff for a few minutes, and sat up in a corner, and said nothing ; but she found herself drawn out by degrees. Every one talked about districts and poor people—that was natural, — but then all had the same interests, so it did not signify ; and Mr. Reeves managed cleverly to lead them away from the state of Rilworth to that of other places, and thence to the position of the country at large ; till by degrees the conversation ceased to be local, and became so interesting, that Katharine was quite sorry when tea was announced. She went down stairs last, and happened to sit next to Mr. Reeves ; and he pursued the subject, and asked her if she had ever read any account of the state of the poor in France before the great Revolution. Katharine coloured, and felt extremely awkward. Very little of her time was given to reading, except when she read out a novel to her mother. She had learnt about the French Revolution when she was at school ; but the details had quite passed away from her mind. Betsy Carter, however, knew a great deal about it, and talked very learnedly, and gave it as her opinion that the French Revolution was clearly marked out in the Book of Revelations ; an observation which Mr. Reeves allowed to drop without notice. Books, however, were evidently his favourite topic, and when he found that Katharine did not say much about them, he addressed himself to the Miss Lockes, who were also near him. Katharine was very much amused in listening to what was said. The Miss Lockes were both well informed and well bred, and so were the two elderly brown ladies, the Miss Tracys, opposite to them ; and at times, when any book was mentioned which was universally popular, the conversation became quite general. Katharine did not feel herself as ignorant when story books were named as she did when there was an allusion to history ; but she could not venture to say much, though Mr. Reeves made several attempts to draw her out. — "I suppose you have not much time for reading," he said at length. — "Not much, sir," was the answer. "I read books from the library sometimes to

my mother." — "And you have a very fair choice there," said Mr. Reeves; "I don't know a better circulating library anywhere than Mr. Ashton's, he has so many books of a better stamp than novels." — "I think I read most of the novels," said Katharine, candidly; "my mother likes them best." — "I shall quarrel with you if you do that," said Mr. Reeves, good-naturedly. "You should take example from my friend here, Miss Locke, who studies every thing from algebra downwards." — "Study would be very nice I daresay, if one had a good deal of time for it," said Katharine. — "And it is very nice when one has very little time for it," replied Mr. Reeves; "especially if a person wants to be useful, which I am sure you do." — "But reading about the French Revolution will not help to make me useful, though it may be very interesting," said Katharine. — "I should like to argue that point with you," said Mr. Reeves, lightly; "but my tracts will never have their new covers if we begin now, so I shall leave you to your work, and look in again upon you by-and-by." — He retreated to his study and the rest of the party went up stairs again. Tea had made every one sociable; and as they all drew round the table, with the blazing fire, and the bright lamp lighting up the room, Katharine thought they were a very comfortable party, and wonderfully at home, considering how very little they knew of each other. Mrs. Reeves suggested what each was to do. It was evident that she was an orderly person, and had planned it all beforehand, for there was no time lost in discussion; and when the division of labour was made, she proposed to read out whilst the work went on, and at once brought out a light book of travels; and in this way the business of the evening proceeded. It was all very odd to Katharine — it seemed extremely like playing at work; but there was something pleasant in it, cheerful, and hearty; and she felt drawn in a manner towards those who were working with her, much more so than she could ever have been to Matty Andrews, or the Miss Maddens, if she had visited them every evening for a month. The work took a longer time than could have been expected. Mrs. Reeves read till she was tired; so did Miss Locke, and one of the Miss Tracys; and then Mrs. Reeves proposed that they should have some music, and went herself to the piano, and sang. Katharine enjoyed that extremely. She had a quick ear for music, and could play a little herself, but she had never practised much since she left school, and had not often an opportunity of hearing good music. One of the Miss Lockes also sang nicely, and she and Mrs. Reeves tried some duets together; and then Mr. Reeves, hearing the music going on, came in, and there

was some more conversation about music in general, and the church music ; and Mr. Reeves suggested a plan for making the school children practise better ; and two or three of the persons present engaged to meet at the church, once a week, to practise with them. Katharine felt strongly that she was in an atmosphere of usefulness, and it suited her active mind much better than any other. But it was not a kind of society which every one would enjoy ; Selina, for instance, would have been quite out of her element in it. The party broke up about half-past nine. Katharine was to walk home with the Miss Lockes, who lived at the bottom of High Street. She was ready before them, and waited in the drawing-room whilst they were putting on their bonnets, and talking to Mrs. Reeves in another room. Mr. Reeves was with her, and, rather to Katharine's alarm, renewed the conversation about books, by offering to lend her the volume of travels they had been reading, if she would like to have it. "I should like to think you were a reading person," he said ; "it would save you a good deal of pain in life." — "And make me useful?" said Katharine. — "Yes, help very much — a great deal more than you think — to make you useful. I wish you would begin to read." Katharine laughed. "I should like it, sir, if I had books and time, and ——" "Oh ! but make time," interrupted Mr. Reeves ; "real readers always make time." — "How?" asked Katharine. — "In the same way that every one makes time for what he likes. It is an instinct, to be proved by experience, not by rule. And, my dear Miss Ashton, if you don't begin now, you never will do so." — "Not when I am old and infirm, and have nothing else to do?" said Katharine. "No, indeed. There is no taste more difficult to acquire, and no habit more easily lost, than that of reading. Begin early, and it will be a blessing to you through life ; neglect it, and you may spend weeks, and months, and even years, of helpless old age, longing that you could care for books, and yet unable to take an interest in them." — "But you must not think I never read," said Katharine ; "I do very often read to my mother ; and now and then I do in the evening to my father, only he falls asleep generally." — "But that kind of desultory reading is not what I mean," said Mr. Reeves. "Really sensible, useful reading is what I want to see you, and many like you, taking delight in ; history, biography, travels, and of course, religious reading, — but that I don't think you are so likely to omit." — "Persons like me," said Katharine, "think so much of household duties, that it seems almost out of place, and not exactly a waste of time, but something very like it, to

spend our leisure in what can be of so very little importance to us." — "Yet you — I don't mean you individually — think it no waste of time to learn a little French, and a little music, and to make beautiful figures in coloured worsteds, and all those wonderful ins and outs with crooked needles, which are so much the fashion." Katharine laughed. "I dare say it is very ignorant of me not to know the advantage of such occupations," continued Mr. Reeves; "but you must own that they are not more decidedly useful — since you insist so much upon that point — than reading history." — "I quite think the reading history would be much more agreeable and much more profitable than worsted work and crochet," replied Katharine; "but really I scarcely ever do either." — "I quite believe you; I am sure you are an excellent house-keeper, and keep your father's accounts, and make his shirts, and do every thing which people say our grandmothers used to do; and I should be the very last person to suggest putting a stop to any of these things. All I beg for is, that if there should be a few leisure moments in the course of the day, they may be devoted to regular reading, — what, perhaps, I may call study, — and not merely to amusement. I should like to think that you had always some sensible book in hand; that when one was finished, another was begun. I will tell you one reason why I am so earnest upon this point," he continued, becoming more grave; "it will not perhaps at once approve itself to your mind, but I think you will enter into it when you have thought it over. There is an immense impetus given to education now amongst the lower classes, — they are treading very fast upon the heels of those immediately above them. National education has done this, whether wisely or unwisely I will not pretend to say; but if we wish to keep society in its proper state, we must not let those who are below us in outward circumstances rise above us in intellect and information. If they do they will naturally rebel against our superiority, and desire to take our place. As an instance, in a town like Rilworth a great deal of the work must be done by the help of persons like yourself, very much engaged in daily business, but willing to spare a little time to the poor. Sunday-school work is almost entirely carried on in this way; but it requires more than a good heart to be a really good Sunday-school teacher. There must be thought, and study, and acquaintance with history, and the manners and customs of foreign countries; for though it did very well in former days to go through a mere routine of lessons, it will not do now. Children whose intellects have been worked during the week will also require a stimulus to their attention on the Sunday; but I

cannot say myself that I know many people able to give it, though I have most kind and useful helpers in the school." Katharine looked puzzled and frightened — the idea was beyond her; and Mr. Reeves saw it, and said, "Perhaps I ought not to have troubled you with a reason of that kind, which principally concerns myself. You must not think I want you to study, and become a learned person, in order to seize upon you for my Sunday-school. I was only speaking generally, and perhaps, even more with a view to large manufacturing towns, than to Rilworth particularly. But for yourself alone, I am sure you would find that any thing which strengthens and enlarges your mind, as steady reading does and must, will also help to fit you for the daily duties of life, and make you more prepared for any position in which it may please God to place you. The very effort which thoughtful reading requires is an inestimable benefit. May I give you the book of travels?" he added, with a smile, as Mrs. Reeves and the Miss Lockes entered the room. Katharine could only say, "Thank you very much, sir," and tell Mrs. Reeves, as she wished her good night, that she had had a very pleasant evening.

"We shall triumph over the Union Ball, now, my dear," said Mr. Reeves to his wife, as he sat down by the fireside, when the party had dispersed, and looked complacently round the room. "There is more unity in covering tracts than in dancing the polka together. Unity in work, not in play, that I suspect is the secret." — "Only it is such a very small amount of unity," replied Mrs. Reeves. — "Never mind, it is a beginning; and even if it should never extend further, it is founded on a sure principle, and therefore must last, and have influence." — "The difficulty is, that unity in work must be exclusive," said Mrs. Reeves; "people may dance together, whatever principles they hold, but they cannot work. You could not, for instance, have asked dissenters to help you in arranging church tracts." — "But is there any real unity where there is not exclusiveness?" said Mr. Reeves. "Look at the ordering of Providential arrangements with regard to families, nations, and even the Christian church. Can any thing be more exclusive? — Real unity involves unity of feeling," he continued, after a pause; "feeling is dependent upon principles of faith and practice; principles upon truth; and truth is in its very nature exclusive. I grant you that we cannot ask dissenters to help us in our work; but neither can they ask us; and so we may agree to differ; and in that very agreement we shall find a certain amount of unity, because each will be upholding principles which are honestly

believed to be truth." — "You will never, I am afraid, find any mere worldly people join with you in your theory of unity," observed Mrs. Reeves. — "Of course not; but then I shall not expect it. You cannot make worldly people one; because, in order to be so, they must move round one common centre? whilst, being what they are, the centre of each is self; therefore there are as many centres as there are individuals." — "And yet, when one thinks of it, this does not seem to be quite the case always," replied Mrs. Reeves. "Consider how men of all ranks and all characters, good and bad, unite on certain occasions, — elections for instance; or even, as one may see every day in a town like Rilworth, when any public work is to be done." — "Exactly so; but that is just what I say, they unite for work, and they have, for the time, a common centre of interest. Such unity is true, and legitimate, and useful. The misfortune is, that it cannot last, because, when the object is accomplished, the feeling of unity will die away. If, therefore, we wish for lasting unity, we must have a lasting centre, and lasting work. I confess I see it nowhere except in work done for God's glory, and the good of His Church. I think St. Paul teaches us something of this kind," he added, taking up a Bible; and he turned to the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and pointed to the words, "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." — "Yes," replied Mrs. Reeves, when he had finished reading; "and if the persons you collect together were all simple and good, like Mrs. Forbes and Katharine Ashton, it might be easy enough to produce a feeling of unity, by making them work for a common object. But when one finds forward, pushing people, like Miss Carter, one involuntarily shrinks back." — "We must take people as they are. There is a great deal of good about Miss Carter, in spite of her forwardness; and if we can work upon that, we may hope by-and-by that the worldly taint which makes her forward will diminish. When people are thoroughly Christian, they become also thoroughly well-bred. They see that God no more intends outward distinctions to be done away with, because in His sight we are one, than He does that we should all be equally rich, because we are equally mortal." — "Then you don't think Miss Carter will be angry with us because we do not ask her to a

regular dinner party?" said Mrs. Reeves. — "She may or may not be; if she is, the fault will be hers, not ours. Regular dinner parties, of which, by-the-bye, we have not given one, to the best of my knowledge, for the last twelvemonth, are formalities of the world, to be governed by the rules of the world, like visits, or dress, or any other custom." — "And balls the same," said Mrs. Reeves, laughing. Mr. Reeves looked half-annoyed, and half-amused. "I could tell you such absurdities about that ball," he said; "grave matters, too, which may have grave consequences. There is a complete split, I find, between what are called the Duchess's party, — young Andrews and his friends, for instance, and the town party; and it is supposed that it will tell considerably on the next election; and that Colonel Forbes will not have half the chance he had; for they say that the grandee supper, as it is called, was his doing." — "What folly!" exclaimed Mrs. Reeves. — "Yes; but more folly, a thousand times, in those who planned such an absurdity, than in those who carry it out to its natural consequences. Colonel Forbes ought to have known better." — "I can fancy a man's making such a mistake," replied Mrs. Reeves, "because men are accustomed to join with people of every kind in matters of business; and so they may naturally suppose that they would meet just as pleasantly for amusement." — "He should have consulted a few ladies first," said Mr. Reeves, with a smile. "Rilworth ladies, who could understand the feeling of the town; and not the Duchess of Lowther, who could know nothing about it. Women are the really difficult people to manage when unity is in question." — "Because they are not accustomed to work for a common object, and move round a common centre," said Mrs. Reeves. — "No; they are essentially individual, and there is really only one principle to unite them." — "The principle which made us work so diligently to cover your church tracts," said Mrs. Reeves. — "I hope so. I give you credit for it at least. And now we had better ring for prayers."

CHAPTER XXI.

DAYS went quickly on, and Katharine began to count how many more must pass before the arrival of Colonel and Mrs. Forbes at Maplestead. Whenever she went with her brother or her father to Moorlands, and this was not unfrequently, she saw something in

the way of preparation going on about the house and in the grounds. More gardeners seemed at work, and there were repairs at the lodge, and the chimneys smoked more numerous and constantly, as if the rooms were being well aired. Report said they were to be at home the end of November ; but Katharine had heard nothing to be depended upon, and when she had asked once or twice at the Lodge, all the answer she could obtain was, "Can't say for certain, Miss." At last, however, a definite idea was given her in the form of a letter from Colonel Forbes to her father, giving an order for some very handsome books, which he wished to have placed in Mrs. Forbes's morning room before her return on the 8th. There was a pleasant postscript for Katharine in the letter : "If it were not too much trouble, it would be a great satisfaction to Colonel Forbes if Miss Ashton would be so very kind as to see herself that the books were properly arranged. He should have hesitated to ask the favour, but he believed Miss Ashton would be glad to do any thing which might conduce to Mrs. Forbes's pleasure." Katharine's eyes sparkled with delight. Yes, indeed Colonel Forbes was right ; she should like nothing better ; she would go over that very afternoon.—"Only the books are not ready, my child," said Mr. Ashton, quietly, as he stood by her, holding the open letter in his hand. "So kind of him it is to ask me !" continued Katharine, scarcely hearing what her father said ; "I wish he would let me have the whole care of putting her rooms in order for her. Wouldn't I work hard !"—"I don't see much kindness, except to himself," said Mr. Ashton : "he wants the books unpacked and put up, and he doesn't like to trust his servants to touch them ; that's the long and short of the matter. But, Kitty, you are bewitched with Mrs. Forbes, and the Colonel too, I believe."—"Not the Colonel, father ; no, not the Colonel," said Katharine, in a tone of merriment ; "only when he asks me to do the very thing I like best."—"But I don't see how you are to be spared from home next week," said Mrs. Ashton ; "John was talking to your father and me last night, after you went to-bed."—"Oh ! is that it ?" exclaimed Katharine ; "I was sure he had something on his mind, by the way he hurried me off to-bed."—"Miss Selly consents to exchange the Miss for Mrs. whenever John chooses," said Mr. Ashton, "and of course John chooses the first day possible, which will be Wednesday week."—"That won't interfere with me," exclaimed Katharine : "Wednesday is the 6th." Then, with rather a vexed smile, she added, "I am glad John was not here to hear me think of myself first ; but I do feel, mother, that he might have told me the day himself."—"He is a little shy of talking about it

with you," said Mrs. Ashton ; " he and Selly both see you don't half like it."—"I wish not to show that I don't, I am sure," replied Katharine ; " and, mother, I really do with all my heart try to think the best of it ; and I quite allow Selina is very handsome, and cheerful, and pleasant, when things go smooth ; and she is very kind to me always. I am sure there is no reason for me to feel"—the sentence was not finished, for Katharine bit her lip to prevent the awkward rush of feeling which she feared might escape her. " It's a little hard upon poor John, I must say, Kitty," observed Mrs. Ashton ; " so kind as he has always been to you, and thoughtful too ! Only the other day saying that he hoped you would go over to Moorlands whenever you liked ; and laughing and saying you should be his bailiff when you were tired of the shop."—"Did he say that?" exclaimed Mr. Ashton ; " then he is a wiser man than I took him for. I would match my Kitty's common sense against half the experimental farmers in the kingdom, let alone Charlie Ronaldson, who is a quick-witted youth, only rather given to crotchets. Cheer up, Kitty, my child ; you shall have a farm of your own to manage one of these days."—"Thank you, father," said Katharine, smiling ; " and when that happens you shall be my bailiff. But, mother, did John say any thing to you about my not liking the marriage?"—"He said he did not like to talk to you about Moorlands," replied Mrs. Ashton ; " and he hinted that Selina thought you looked askance at her."—"Now, really," exclaimed Katharine, "that is too bad ! I have only been asked to drink tea at the Fowlers' twice since Selly was engaged, and once then she looked so awkward at introducing me when Miss Lane came in that I thought she was quite ashamed of me. But, mother, dear, did John say any thing else?"—"Nothing that I remember, only whether you would choose to be bridesmaid."—"Of course, I shall," said Katharine ; " it is my place ; and if I hated the marriage twenty times more than I do, I would not let the world see it."—"Bravely said, Kitty," exclaimed Mr. Ashton, patting her on the shoulder : " if it comes to a fight between you and Miss Selly, remember I back you." Katharine blushed, and looked heartily ashamed of herself. " Oh ! father, I do wish I was not so cross ; I wish things didn't make me so cross ; but,—I won't talk of that though. Mother, do you know what dress the bridesmaids are to wear?"—"And who they are to be?" added Mr. Ashton ; " I have not heard that yet."—"Matty Andrews, and Julia Madden, and a cousin of Selly's, and our Kate," replied Mrs. Ashton : " I don't quite know what they have fixed on to wear."—"But I must know to-night or to-morrow," said Katharine ;

"there will be no time to get the dress made else. I think," she added, in an under tone, "they might have done me the honour of consulting me."—"Well, you had best go and have your quarrel out with Miss Selly," said Mr. Ashton; "I see you are determined to pick a fault in her. I am thankful I am not going to be your sister-in-law, Kitty."—"Indeed, father,"—and Katharine looked very much distressed;—"I do mean to behave kindly, and do all I can to make her and John happy, but you know things are aggravating sometimes."—"Because you women make them so," said Mr. Ashton; "if you had great matters to worry about, you would not trouble yourselves about little ones. What can it signify to you whether you have been consulted about a dress or not, so long as it is ready in time?"—"Nothing, father, nothing; I was very silly,"—and Katharine shut herself up in close reserve, and determined never again to venture upon the smallest expression of her feelings as to the marriage. Yet it did signify a great deal to her. The neglect might appear trifling to Mr. Ashton, but to Katharine it was another symptom of the unkindness from which she suffered in some manner almost every day. Selina was drawing her brother out of his own family into hers; not perhaps by any premeditated plan,—she had not sense enough for that,—but simply because her pride was great and her will strong. John spent almost every evening at Mr. Fowler's, but Selina made never-ending excuses when it was any question of her drinking tea at Mr. Ashton's. She could find time for a gossiping walk with the Miss Maddens, but she had never a moment to spare for Katharine; and though she would make Katharine useful in working for her, and even allowed her to assist in making up some of the furniture for Moorlands, she scarcely ever asked her opinion upon any point. Katharine was by nature as proud in her way as Selina was in hers: her spirit rebelled against any thing like impertinence or neglect. It was only by the greatest effort at self-command that she could refrain from giving quick answers, or making contemptuous remarks. In spite of her best endeavours, the feelings which were so frequently and suddenly excited would occasionally find vent, as they had on that particular occasion; but they were always followed by a bitter repentance. Katharine went to her room now far more angry with herself than she had ever been with Selina,—and yet angry with her too,—and especially pained that her father did not understand her, and her mother did not help her. There was a complete turmoil of conflicting feelings in her breast. She had cause to complain; she knew that; yet, as she said to herself, it was so silly, so wrong, to speak when speaking could do.

no good, and she had so often resolved not to do it ! It was so weak to break her resolutions in that way ! And, after all, what did she care about being consulted ? It was very little to her whether her dress was to be white, or pink, or blue ; and if her opinion had been asked, it would most probably not have been taken. But Katharine could not reason herself into good-humour ; she had learnt that : all persons with irritable tempers must learn it sooner or later, if they hope to acquire self-command. But she could pray, and she did pray, at first repeating words without being actually able to apply the meaning to them,—her thoughts were so pre-occupied, and her feelings so excited,—but becoming gradually calmer as she tried to fix her attention, and at last feeling that the victory was gained, and she could think of Selina charitably, of her father and mother dutifully, and of herself humbly and with sorrow, yet not without a certain consciousness of having been enabled to struggle, and in a measure to conquer, which was a great support to her resolutions.

And then she went out into her district. That was better for Katharine than a sermon. Life there was so real in its suffering, so serious in its events and their consequences, that the trifling worries of a home like hers sank into utter nothingness. The poor shoemaker was dying, his wife nursing him, with a despairing hope which would not see the evil that stared her in her face ; and the help that was given could not keep her and her children from heavy privations ; and the past was dreary, and the future at that moment without a ray of light to brighten it. Katharine sat down by the bedside, and heard moans for which she had no relief, and saw tears which she had no power to dry, and thought with shame of those which she had herself wasted upon the passing annoyances of a moment. And from the shoemaker's she went to another and a smaller cottage, where an only daughter was dying of consumption, killed by hard work and insufficient food ; and from thence to a house, respectable in appearance, which was about to be left for a wretched hovel in Briton's-court, because the father of the family had met with an accident, and lost his health and his work ; and from thence she visited her first acquaintance, Jemmy Dawes, and listened to his aunt's story of the boy's drunken father, who had brought his wife and the children to ruin ; and at last she turned into Woodgate Street, to say a few words to Anne Crossin, the washerwoman, and found her working for her blind husband and her nine children, cheerful, thankful, and hopeful,—and by that time her own lesson of resignation was thoroughly learnt.

The parlour at home was, as it always was after these district visits, a paradise of rest and comfort; and still more resting to Katharine's mind was the volume of travels which Mr. Reeves had lent her, and which she was reading through regularly. She had but one half-hour to devote to it—the half-hour before tea; but Katharine was very methodical in her habits, and when she had made up her mind that the book was to be read, she fixed the time and kept to it. And she was already reaping the benefit, feeling that she was gaining new ideas and enlarging her subjects of thought. Not that it was always easy to read; it was very difficult, indeed, at first, for she had acquired a habit of reading out light books to her mother, without much attention, and it was long since she had applied herself to any thing like study. But Katharine, besides being naturally very intelligent, was blessed with great power of will, strengthened by continual exercise in a right direction.—What she ought to do she felt she could do. Mr. Reeves had told her she ought to cultivate her mind, and she determined that she would do so, first by reading, then by conversation. Katharine found, that when people talked of things they understood, there was a good deal to be gained from conversation. Her father was a very well informed man upon subjects connected with his business, and many others of general interest, and there were several persons like him whom she occasionally saw.—It was a pleasant thought that Charles Ronaldson would be drinking tea with them that evening: his conversation was always improving, only Katharine was too much afraid of him to ask questions.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE bridesmaids' dresses were to be pale violet silk, and the bonnets were to be pink satin; and a satin bonnet was Katharine's abhorrence; but she behaved uncommonly well when the unpleasant fact was communicated to her, and only petitioned, rather too urgently since it was all in vain, for a straw bonnet—fancy straw, if necessary,—which might be trimmed with white, and so serve for ordinary occasions. It seemed to Katharine as if she had done nothing but think of, and buy, useless dresses of late. There was the ball dress—the white muslin with the pink sash—lying in her drawer, unthought of; and this dreadful new bonnet was likely, she was sure, to have the same fate. Why did

people choose things which could be no good afterwards? Selina was very little with them now; all her thoughts were of course occupied with preparations; and Katharine could not help contrasting Jane Sinclair's quiet seriousness, when she spoke of the future, and the thoughtful care which could arrange for the comfort of others up to almost the last moment before her marriage, with the whirl of folly and expense in which Selina was involved. But there was no opening for remonstrance; Katharine knew she was looked down upon; and besides, Selina had an excuse ready for every wish: "She was not likely to be married more than once in her life, and so she had better make the most of the occasion."

Moorlands was beginning to look very comfortable, though there was a good deal still to be done in the way of repairs; but these were chiefly in the outhouses, and could be managed best, John said, after they were settled there; so the ornamental part of the work was attended to first, as being the most pressing. After the wedding it was proposed that John and Selina should spend a fortnight with one of Mrs. Fowler's sisters, who lived at a small watering-place about twenty miles from Rilworth; and during that time Mr. Ashton agreed that Moorlands should be made quite ready for them. No one in Mr. Fowler's house talked of any thing but the marriage, neither did any one in Mr. Ashton's, except Katharine; and she, though she did not talk, worked, and that most diligently. As far as she could assist in saving John from foolish expense, she was determined she would; and many things which he would have ordered from an upholsterer's were contrived by her and her mother. Selina, too, made her useful as regarded dress; in fact, the last week before the marriage was so fully occupied, that she had no time for reading, and could not attend to any district business except that which was especially urgent. Katharine found the benefit of all this in its soothing effect upon her own ruffled temper and spirits; whilst she was doing kindnesses, she could not continue to feel unkindly; and John and Selina, and even Mrs. Fowler, were at last aware that Katharine would make a very useful, sensible, good-natured sister-in-law, and, in consequence, began to show her more attention. Mrs. Fowler asked her to drink tea, and said something civil about her to her mother, though it was a little too condescending in style to please Katharine's taste. One thing she was beginning to perceive, and it made the future seem more easy: usefulness was what she was intended for in life, evidently; her quickness in work to be done by the hand, and her quiet, domestic tastes, all tended that way.

If, therefore, she wished to do good to John and Selina, or to any one, she must not try to be agreeable to them, or to humour their tastes, and be like them,—she must simply content herself with being useful.

And with this determination to be useful, Katharine put on her violet silk at half-past eight o'clock on the morning of her brother's wedding-day, and went up to Mrs. Fowler's to know how she could best assist every body. Such a curious contrast the whole thing was to Jane Sinclair's wedding! The comparison was continually in Katharine's mind. Selina so excited, and Mrs. Fowler so bustling; and nothing, as it seemed, to be found in its right place; and not a fourth part of the breakfast preparations ready: Katharine offered to take upon herself that department, and actually went into the dining-room and assisted in putting the dishes upon the table, and twice went up and down the street to fetch things which were wanting from her own home, putting a shawl, though, over the new silk, and borrowing an old bonnet of Selina's, that she might not have the little boys pointing at her for a bridesmaid. And then she and Mr. Fowler consulted about the quantity of wine which would be required; and she went with him to the cellar, and stood at the door, and loaded herself with black bottles, and took care that they were properly decanted, all the time feeling that the new silk dress, though she had put an apron over it, was sadly out of place, and would very likely be spoiled. But all was ready at last, and then Katharine went into the drawing-room to meet her violet sisters, Miss Julia Madden and Matty Andrews, and the cousin Constantia, who had arrived the night before, expressly for the occasion, and had just made her appearance from her bedroom; and no one, except Mrs. Fowler, knew that she, like them, was not fresh from an elaborate toilet.

Numerous were the guests; very gay the dresses; very well decked out the carriages and servants. Selina kept them all waiting about twenty minutes, and then appeared veiled and wreathed in true bridal fashion, and looking very handsome, very merry, and very much at her ease; and the party drove off to the church, and as they went up the church-yard a number of little children threw the scattered remains of dying autumnal flowers into the path, and held out their hands for halfpence. And then—it was a solemn service,—it can never be otherwise; but it seemed to Katharine wonderfully soon over, and in another half-hour she was sitting at Mr. Fowler's breakfast-table, listening to the cheers and speeches in honour of Mr. and Mrs. John Ashton.

A long afternoon that was! It would have been interminable but for the necessity of cutting up wedding cake in three-cornered slices, and packing it in white paper, and tying together glazed cards with satin ribbon and silver thread. That, happily, was something to do, and the bridesmaids were indefatigable for about an hour; but after that time their energy began to flag, and at length failed so entirely that Katharine and Mrs. Fowler were left to complete the work, whilst they went home to rest and prepare for the evening party. Katharine folded, and sealed, and directed, till five o'clock; then sat down to dine upon cold mutton with Mr. and Mrs. Fowler, in the back parlour; then helped to put the drawing-room in order for the evening guests; then went home to array herself once more in white muslin and a pink sash, came back and danced three country dances, and two quadrilles, and about twelve o'clock walked home with her father and mother, and wished them good night with a yawning ejaculation:—"Oh! mother, dear, aren't you glad that marriages don't come every day?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AND the next business was to go over to Maplestead, to arrange the books for Mrs. Forbes. That was the pleasant thought which suggested itself to Katharine, when, tired with the wedding exertions, she awoke at a late hour the following morning. The books had arrived only the day before, and had been sent over in readiness for her unpacking. There were a good many of them, and Colonel Forbes had written again about them to Mr. Ashton, and expressed a fear that Katharine might find the task she had undertaken a little troublesome, as he imagined that the books in the morning-room would require a completely new arrangement. But Katharine was not inclined to think any thing a trouble which could please Mrs. Forbes, and it so happened that the occupation came just at the right moment, when she was feeling a little jaded, and was suffering from the reaction of a week of excitement, so that common duties would have been rather irksome.

Breakfast was not over till after half-past nine o'clock, and then Katharine attended to all her little household duties, and took care that nothing should be wanting for the comfort of her father and mother during the day, and about eleven set off for her walk.

It was a calm, warm December day—misty, yet with occasional gleams of brightness—almost a remembrance of summer; and Katharine very much enjoyed her quiet walk on the beautiful Maplestead Road. She was tired, but not so much physically as mentally, and the silence and solitude were very refreshing. It would have been a good occasion for thought with many, but Katharine had not yet learned to think; she was laying up materials by quick observation, but she was as yet too eager, too rapid and interested, in all she did or saw—the world was too vivid a reality to give her much power of real thought; only, at times, there came that sudden questioning,—that longing to understand the mysteries of life,—that keen perception of the awful depth of misery, and height of happiness, involved in a state of probation, which made her, as it were, pause on the journey of existence, and look round for some one to assist her in bearing the burden of its responsibilities.

Some such feeling came over her mind on this day, as she entered the hall at Maplestead. She had never before been in any place like it. She had never seen any thing so handsome and imposing. It was low, but that she did not notice; it was the vastness which struck her,—the richness of the carvings,—the solemnising effect of the deep windows, and the coloured glass, marked with the arms and crest of the old family of the Clares, from whose possession the place had lately passed, on the death of the last direct representative of the race, a solitary, and, as report said, miserable and miserly old bachelor. The buried hopes of the dead seemed struggling with the bright happiness of the living. Katharine, as she looked around, thought of Jane Forbes returning to this place as her home,—to concentrate in it all her interests,—to fill it with associations of joy,—to make it a scene of peace, and usefulness, and love; and then, like those who had gone before, to pass away,—to be forgotten,—even as if she had never been. It seemed very strange, very wonderful. But for the evidence of her own feelings,—the indestructible consciousness, that life is inexpressibly, unspeakably valuable—Katharine could have gazed on all she saw with indifference, and believe that life was nothing but a dream, its interests unsubstantial, and the necessity for any work which was so soon to be destroyed a vain delusion. There was no one then at hand to remind her that, as we work upon the outer surface of the world which we see, we are at the same moment indenting ineffaceable lines upon that true and spiritual world which lies beneath it.

The housekeeper, who received her in the hall, according, as she

said, to her master's orders, saw that the size of the place, and its beauty, gave her pleasure, and offered to take her over the house ; but Katharine had come for business, and she was not to be turned aside from it. "The days were short," she said, "and she was later than she had intended ; so, if there was no objection, she would go at once to the morning-room, and see what was to be done ; and then, if there was time, she would go over the house before she went home ; or, if not, she might have an opportunity another day."

The housekeeper approved, and led the way up the old-fashioned, shallow steps of the broad oak staircase, which gave Katharine a longing impulse to run up two stairs at once, and reach the top in half the time taken by her stately and portly conductress. Two long, narrow passages diverged from the open lobby at the head of the stairs — the east and west galleries, as the housekeeper called them, when she grandly pointed them out to Katharine ; but the morning-room opened upon the lobby, and into this she was ushered at once. Much more like Jane this was than the hall : the windows were large and modernised, and the ceiling was not so low, and the furniture not by any means so old-fashioned, and Katharine felt the awe which had crept over her considerably diminished. The housekeeper promised to send a man directly to unpack the boxes, and offered luncheon, and did, in fact, every thing which civility could require ; and Katharine took off her bonnet and sat down to rest for a few minutes before she began her work. She was looking round the room, thinking how pretty and pleasant it was, and fancying — not exactly wishing, but fancying — how she should like to be in Jane's position, when the housekeeper came back, bringing in her hand a little note. She was full of apologies: "The note had come the evening before, inclosed in one to herself from the Colonel. She ought to have brought it to Miss Ashton at once, but she had forgotten it at the first moment." Katharine received the note with pleasure, thinking, of course, it was from Jane ; but no, it was in Colonel Forbes's handwriting, and only contained a list of books, placed as nearly as possible in the order in which he wished them to be arranged. The housekeeper went away, and Katharine laid down the note ; but on taking up the paper once more, she saw written on the other side : "Will Miss Ashton be kind enough to see that these directions are fully attended to, and that the room is ready for the reception of Mrs. Forbes on the 7th." — "To-day !" exclaimed Katharine, involuntarily, as she started from her seat ; and without pausing to consider, she rang the bell. A housemaid appeared, and Katharine

begged again to see the housekeeper; and in her impatience to begin her work, as the man promised had not made his appearance, she knelt down on the floor and tried to unfasten the cords of the book-boxes, but they were quite beyond her strength, accustomed though she was to work of the kind. She was nearly out of breath when the housekeeper appeared. "Colonel Forbes says he is to be here this evening," she began, in a complaining tone, as if the housekeeper and the Colonel had been plotting against her. — "Yes, Miss Ashton, this evening; we expect the Colonel and his lady about six o'clock," said the surprised Mrs. Brown. — "But you never told me so," continued Katharine, in the same tone, and pulling, as she spoke, at the cords. — "I thought, of course, Miss Ashton, you knew. The Colonel said he had written to you." — "But I shall not be ready; it is impossible I should be," observed Katharine: "I quite reckoned upon their not being here till the 8th. I am sure Colonel Forbes said so." — "The 8th was the day fixed at first, and then it was changed to the 7th, Miss Ashton; but can't the maids come and help you?" Katharine looked despairingly at the list. "And all the books are to be arranged," she said; "the old as well as the new: they are all marked down." The housekeeper smiled. "Oh! yes, Miss Ashton, of course they are. The Colonel never has any thing done without knowing how; little matters or great, it's all the same. But don't fret about it," she continued, good-naturedly, seeing Katharine's face of vexation; "there are two of the maids doing nothing, and they can quite well make themselves of use. I would come myself, only, really, I have half a hundred things to look to." Katharine was glad of the idea of assistance; but then she recollected her father's remark, that the Colonel did not like the servants to touch his books. She must do it all herself; there was no help for it; but, would the man come and unfasten the cords? It seemed as if there was a spell against that first necessary step. The housekeeper agreed that, if the Colonel had said Miss Ashton was to do it, Miss Ashton must do it, and she departed. And again Katharine sat down, not to rest, but to beat her foot upon the floor in impatience, and then scold herself for naughtiness, feeling all the time as if in some way she had put herself into the power of a master, now that she had once engaged to work for Colonel Forbes. The boxes were unfastened at last, and Katharine began her task, energetically but methodically, feeling that it was very hard work — especially hard after the labours of the preceding day, and the unusually short night's rest — but not daring to leave off: why, she did not exactly ask herself. Partly, it certainly was, because

she would have been sorry that Jane should return and find her room not ready ; but partly also, perhaps mostly, because she could not possibly displease Colonel Forbes.

She worked till it grew dusk, and dusk came alarmingly soon, especially in that room looking to the east, and with the trees of the park rather shutting out the sky. The housekeeper had sent her some luncheon, but she had scarcely touched it ; all she thought of was the necessity of finding vol. ii. and placing it next to vol. i., and taking care that there should be no book turned upside down, no mistake made in titles. At last, as the clock struck four, she began to think of herself and to feel rather exhausted ; and she left off for a few minutes and ate the remainder of the sandwiches, and drank the wine which before she had refused. Mrs. Brown had said she expected them about six, but having been once deceived in her calculations, Katharine could not feel quite secure that they would not, by some unforeseen arrangement, arrive sooner ; and she listened to every distant sound, and even to the moanings of the autumnal wind, thinking that they were surely at hand, and that she should be called to account for her unfinished work. At last it grew so dark that she could not see to finish her work without candles, and then she recollected her walk home—a difficulty not easily to be surmounted. Her father would be displeased if she went back late alone, and yet she had no one to accompany her. Even if she set off at once, she could scarcely reach Rilworth before it was quite dark ; and then to leave the room in such a state—books lying about, packing boxes, paper, dusters—it would put Colonel Forbes in a frenzy to see it. No, she must remain where she was—she must wait and trust that some way would be found of sending her back ; and in the meantime she determined to write a note to her mother, and ask to have it sent into Rilworth, to let her know how she was circumstanced. The idea was no sooner approved of by Katharine's judgment than it was acted upon. Mrs. Brown was summoned, the note written, and dispatched ; candles were brought, and again Katharine set to work. The housemaids also were sent to assist her by putting the room in order, and carrying away the boxes and loose paper ; and there really appeared to be some chance of being ready by the right time. "There is a carriage—I am sure I hear a carriage," said Katharine, laying down a set of small, beautifully-bound volumes of Racine, which she was just going to place upon the top shelf. "Oh ! no, miss ; no carriage," said the upper housemaid ; "the wind always makes that kind of growl when it's getting up." Katharine moved the step ladder, mounted it with

the books in her hand, and listened again. "It is coming nearer; I am certain it is in the avenue."—"Dear no, miss; it is always so," was the reply of the impassive housemaid, who had no cause to fear reproof. Not so Katharine. She cast a despairing glance around the room: "You have not half done what I wanted," she said, impatiently; "can't you carry off all those paper-shreds, and that rope in the corner? Just look, the room is in a complete mess."—"Never fear, miss; it will all be right. Here, Fanny;" and Fanny, the slowest of the slow, waited to be spoken to twice, and then said she would come, and remained to roll up a ball of twine, till Katharine, with her patience utterly exhausted, rushed down from the steps, collected every scrap of rubbish she could find, filled the girl's apron, and bade her carry it off instantly; and, mounting the steps again with some volumes of Racine in her hand, lost her balance, and trying to regain it scattered the volumes on the floor.

"They be come, Esther, and you be wanted." The provoking Fanny put her head in at the door, and vanished again in an instant, followed by Esther. Katharine sat down upon the upper step of the ladder, and felt almost inclined to cry; but she conquered the silly feeling, and tried to finish what the housemaids had left undone. She could not help, however, pausing every now and then to know what was going on in the house, for there was a considerable bustle—distant voices, doors opening and shutting, servants coming up and down the stairs with luggage; and every moment she expected to see Colonel and Mrs. Forbes enter the room. How cordially she wished herself at home! It would seem quite like an intrusion for her to be there just at the moment of their arrival, and they might—or at least the Colonel might—fancy it was done on purpose. As for making the room look as it ought to look, it was perfectly hopeless; and Katharine was becoming so tired and confused, that she gave herself twice the trouble that was necessary, because she could not decide what to do; and so began one thing, and then left it and went to another, and came back again to the first, and in the end scarcely advanced at all. If it had been Miss Sinclair whom she was expecting, what a trifle all this would have seemed! But Mrs. Forbes—that made a most astonishing difference.

She heard them at length come up the great staircase—she heard Jane's sweet voice speaking to the housekeeper, and she caught a few softened tones from Colonel Forbes, addressed apparently to his wife. They were coming, certainly, they must be coming; and Katharine snuffed the tallow candle as the last hope.

of doing something to make the room comfortable. But there was a little respite; Jane went to her own apartment, and Katharine worked on again, and thought she was growing quite callous, till some one touched the handle of the door, and then, as she was kneeling on the floor, she turned her head round suddenly, and saw Colonel Forbes.

He did not see her at first, but she saw him quite plainly—too plainly. He did not exclaim at all, but he walked up to the fireplace and rang the bell violently, and then stood on the hearth-rug with his arms folded. Katharine came forward as bold as a lion in appearance—as timid as a frightened hare in reality. He started as she came into the light, bowed, and, in the stiffest, coldest manner, thanked her for the trouble she had taken. Such a very peculiar emphasis there was on the word trouble! Katharine felt offended, and replied, “that he could not think from what he saw that she had taken any trouble, but there had been some most unfortunate mistakes.”—“Oh! pray don’t distress yourself to explain; pray don’t think it of any consequence,” and the bell received another violent pull. The first was answered almost at the same moment. “Send the housemaid here to remove all this rubbish, and let candles be carried into my study.” He walked up to the bookshelves, and on his way stumbled over an unfortunate volume which had fallen from Katharine’s hand, and which she had not perceived. One of the leaves was crumpled, and he brought it to the light, inspected it, but made no observation; and then, taking up the candle, walked carefully round the room, kicking at every piece of paper which lay in his way, and stooping down, evidently with the idea that he should find some more of his beautiful books in the same unseemly position.

It really was to Katharine the most uncomfortable moment she had ever experienced; she did not know whether to stay or go—whether to apologise and explain, or remain silent. She was debating still, when her difficulty was solved, for Jane entered the room. Katharine’s impulse was to rush up to her; but she was stopped, for Jane’s first thought and first glance were for her husband, yet her first words, accompanied by a kind though rather nervous greeting, were for Katharine. “How good it was,” she said, “to be there working so hard and so late. She had heard all about the mistake from the housekeeper, and she was so sorry. She should not have thought of giving such trouble herself. It was Colonel Forbes.” A pause, and a second glance at her husband. She went up to him, “Dear Philip,” and her hand was laid

fondly on his shoulder, "we will all work hard together to-morrow." He could not resist her smile, and when he looked at her he smiled too, but he said nothing to Katharine. "We have kept Katharine so late we must send her home in the carriage," continued Jane; "the horses will scarcely have been taken out." Still the Colonel was silent. "If I might have any one to walk with me," said Katharine, "that is all I should want; and I might stay then later and finish my work, if there was no objection." She said this to Jane, but it was answered by Colonel Forbes: "You are very good, Miss Ashton, but I see no necessity for giving you more trouble; we will take care that you shall have a safe escort." He re-opened the injured book and once more held it to the candle. Jane snuffed the wick, which had again become deplorably long, and laughed faintly, and said, "It is not a very splendid light, had we not better go down-stairs?" He laid the book on the table with the air of a martyr, and left the room with a cold "Good evening, Miss Ashton," and "thank you. Jane, are you ready for dinner?—It wants but three minutes."

"I must not keep him," said Jane, in an accent of relief, as soon as the door was closed; "but, dear Katharine, I am so infinitely obliged to you, and so distressed at the annoyance you have had.—Don't think about that, pray," she added, as Katharine's eye rested upon the unhappy volume of Racine; "the crease will soon wear out, and Colonel Forbes will forget it to-morrow. What I want to arrange now is about your going home; you can't really walk. I wish—but can't you sleep here? can't we send word to your father and mother that you will sleep here?"—"Oh, no!" Katharine rejected the idea in a moment. "She did not in the least care for the walk," she said. "She would rather walk indeed."—"The second bell!" exclaimed Jane. "I must not wait a minute. Dear Katharine, thank you a thousand times; please settle whatever you like with the housekeeper. I shall come and see you the very first day I can. Thank you, once more, so very, very much; I would wait if I could, but I must not." Jane gave a parting most affectionate shake of the hand, and Katharine was left in the still untidy room, with the candle nearly burnt to its socket, to determine for herself what was to be done. She felt very angry, very proud, as much so with Jane as with the Colonel, in the first moments of petulance. What signified kind words when kind deeds were wanting? The carriage!—she would sooner set off by herself and walk alone to Rilworth, and trust to make her excuses with her father than accept one out of twenty

carriages if they were all at the door waiting for her; and as to sleeping in the house, sooner than put herself under the obligation, she would beg for a bed at the lodge. Yet something in her heart reproached her as she thought this—a recollection of the parting kiss on the wedding day—the kiss which she had felt at the time would bind her to Jane for life. No, she would not be hard upon her, she would wait and not judge; but she was disappointed bitterly, that she could not help. And now what was to be done? Katharine thought she heard a housemaid coming up the stairs, and went out to see, but she met one of the men-servants bringing her a message from Colonel Forbes: “It was raining a little, and if Miss Ashton did not object to go home in the tilted cart, it was quite at her service;” and there were a few pencil lines scribbled by Jane on the back of a letter.—“Dear Katharine: Shall you mind the cart very much? I could not get any thing better because Colonel Forbes says the horses have been such a distance; and will you object to having tea in the housekeeper’s room? she will be charmed to make you comfortable. So many thanks for all you have done. Affectionately yours, J.F.”—If it had been a wheelbarrow which was offered her, Katharine would not have cared then. She felt that she had been unjust. Jane Forbes was still Jane Sinclair, and could not forget her comfort. She went to the housekeeper’s room and had her tea, and rested in the arm-chair, and was waited upon very kindly; and then the tilted cart came to the door, and Jane hurried out from the dining-room to bid her once more good-bye, and she was driven home safely.

A great many thoughts, and fancies, and cogitations filled Katharine’s mind that evening; but one was uppermost—for what inducement would she consent to change places with Jane Forbes?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next morning Katharine was lingering after breakfast, amusing her mother with her little adventures of the preceding day, when Mr. Ashton came in from the shop, bringing news from Maplestead: “That set of Racine returned, Kitty; sent in by a servant with a note, begging that I will try and dispose of it for Colonel Forbes as a second-hand book, as it has been injured, and procure him another copy. What can be the meaning of it? Is it my fault or theirs, I wonder.” Katharine coloured with

vexation, but could not help laughing. "It is my doing, father ; all owing to that unfortunate downfall. But can you imagine a man's being so particular?"—"You don't understand what gentlemen are with their books, when they care for them at all, Kitty," said Mr. Ashton. "It is very provoking ; and the Colonel won't look very pleasantly on you, child, for giving him the worry."—"No," said Katharine, becoming more vexed as she gave the subject further consideration ;—"and he is not a man to make an apology to. Do you think, father?" She stopped in the middle of her sentence, afraid to mention her wish ; but she was helped by her mother : "If the Colonel really does feel it's Kitty's doing, Mr. Ashton, the shortest way would be to take the books back and sell them second-hand for ourselves, and get him another copy at our expense. It wouldn't be such a very great loss."—"More than you think for, my dear," was the reply ; and Mr. Ashton, who would have been just the person to propose the plan himself, after the deliberation of another five minutes, was now exceedingly annoyed at having it suggested to him. "I don't see," he continued, "why I am to be made to suffer from Kitty's carelessness. If she spoils books she must pay for them. I declare I have a good mind to take the money from the next fineries she wants." Katharine did not say that was just what she would wish, because she knew that argument would make him more angry than contradiction. She allowed him to give vent to a few more hasty words, and then she said : "If I might walk over to Maplestead this morning and see Mrs. Forbes, I might make an apology to her at any rate."—"Perhaps that would be the best way," said Mrs. Ashton ; "at any rate, you would see then whether the Colonel is really very much put out."—"Aye, go," said Mr. Ashton, his brow, in spite of himself, relaxing into good humour ; "but mind you tell her that you are to pay for the books yourself. I protest you shall. I won't bear waste and carelessness from any one." Katharine gave him a kiss, and he returned it with the assurance that she was the most good-for-nothing child in Rilworth ; and then he went back to his shop looking as pleased as if nothing disagreeable had occurred, and Katharine turned to her mother to thank her for coming to her assistance. "Your father is not in earnest about your paying for those books, Kate," said Mrs. Ashton ; "it's only just his fancy of the moment."—"I know that, mother, though I should be very willing to do any thing I could about them : but what I really care for is putting Colonel Forbes out. Yet I don't think he can be angry any more when I have explained what is

to be done. He won't think it a liberty though, will he?" she added, becoming alarmed at her own temerity. "He can't very well do that," said Mrs. Ashton; "but at any rate Mrs. Forbes will help you out of your difficulty; as for him, there is something in his mouth which I don't quite fancy."—"There is something in every feature which I don't," exclaimed Katharine; "but," recollecting herself, she added, "that is only my prejudice, though, mother. People say he is very good, and I am sure Mrs. Forbes thinks him perfection."—"Wait till she has tried him for a twelvemonth, Kitty," said Mrs. Ashton; and Katharine thought to herself, though she did not say it, that a shorter time than that would suffice for her.

She prepared for her walk to Maplestead almost immediately afterwards, hoping, as she said, to be back in time for dinner, but at the same time begging her mother not to wait for her. She had a little district business to attend to besides, so she might be detained; and dinner did not signify: the housekeeper at Maplestead would be sure, she said, to give her some bread and cheese. Just, however, as she was going out of the door, one of the poor shoemaker's children stopped her, with the intelligence that "father was worse, and mother would like to see her." There was no resisting such an application, and Katharine hurried to Long-lane. The case was one of more apparent than real danger; at least at the moment. Katharine, inexperienced though she was in illness, soon saw that. She could only recommend that Mr. Fowler should be sent for; and promise some strengthening broth in the course of the day, though feeling in her own mind that she might be rather puzzled to procure it without giving her mother and the servant more trouble than she liked. The Miss Ronaldsons' back door reminded her that broth of some kind was generally at hand in their house, and if they had it they would be sure to give it willingly. She was sufficiently at home now to enter by the kitchen; and she made her way to the parlour, and knocked at the door. The "come in" was not quite as instantaneous as usual. Katharine heard smothered voices, and a little pushing aside of chairs. When the door was opened she found herself not only in the presence of the Miss Ronaldsons, but of Charles, his mother, and Mr. Reeves. It was impossible not to remark the startled yet almost amused expression of each face, Charles Ronaldson's only excepted. He coloured crimson, caught up his hat instantly, and after waiting for a few minutes and being told by Katharine that Colonel and Mrs. Forbes were returned, and that she was going over to Maplestead, he shook

hands with her, and muttering something to his aunts about seeing them again before he went, hastened out of the room. Mrs. Ronaldson was a gentle-looking, elderly woman, with an anxious expression of countenance. Katharine had never seen much of her before, but she was pleased now with her very kind manner; there was something of peculiar interest about it, which was winning, without any attempt at being so. Time was precious, but Katharine did not like at once to say what she had to say, and then go. It seemed necessary to ask about Miss Ronaldson's pain in the chest, and Miss Priscilla's rheumatism; and inquiries were to be made also for Mrs. Reeves; and now that she had an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Reeves, there were several parish matters to be mentioned: all this kept her more than twenty minutes longer than would otherwise have been necessary, the broth matter having been settled as soon as mentioned, and the servant dispatched with a jug containing enough not only for the poor man, but for half his family besides. Katharine did not at all dislike her little visit, they were all so kind to her, only they were rather too attentive, and would listen to every word she said, Mrs. Ronaldson especially. Even Mr. Reeves had something peculiar in his manner, and every now and then the corners of his mouth lengthened, and he bit his lips as if almost unable to restrain a smile.

As Katharine stood up to go, every one else stood up too; and Miss Ronaldson quite grasped her hand: "Good-bye, my dear; be sure you come again soon, we shall always be delighted to see you, shan't we, Prissy?" and she looked round a little tremulously at her sister. "I may tell you—it's no secret—do you know, my dear, our nephew Charlie has had a fine situation given him?"—another doubtful glance at Miss Priscilla—"given him by the Duke of Lowther. Three hundred a year at once, and in time may be a great deal more," said Miss Priscilla, solemnly; "Yes, my dear, yes." Miss Ronaldson looked much relieved at this public testimony of Miss Priscilla's approval of the subject she had chosen. "Three hundred a year at once, and the last agent made the place worth six, they say. It's for the Duke's estates in the north."—"A great blessing for my dear boy, indeed," said Mrs. Ronaldson, "only it will take him so far from his friends."—"Yes, unless he can get new friends," observed Miss Ronaldson. "There's nothing like family happiness, is there, my dear Katharine?"—"No, indeed," replied Katharine; "I do hope Mr. Ronaldson will have that wherever he may be."—"Yes, we all hope it, we hope it very much, my dear. Mr.

Reeves knows we hope it." Mr. Reeves smiled a very odd smile, which was almost a laugh; but his voice and manner were very earnest as he said, "One is afraid to hope too much; but whatever his happiness may be he will deserve it, as far as a human being can." Katharine thought them all very odd; she did not know whether they were going to laugh or cry, but she was not inclined to do either herself, only she was very glad that Charles Ronaldson was to have three hundred a-year.

"Such an odd feeling it is to change suddenly, as one does, from one set of ideas to another," thought Katharine, as she stood at the hall door at Maplestead. The district and the Miss Ronaldsons and Charles, and his situation, were then like things of a year gone by, compared with Jane and the Colonel, and the spoilt volume of Racine. She began to be very nervous now that the moment for making her apology was so near, and to wish that the Colonel might be out, and she might say what she had to say to Mrs. Forbes alone; yet it was interesting to her to be there, she wanted to see Jane again, to accustom herself to look upon her as the mistress of Maplestead, and to settle if she could the last evening's impressions, which were so strange and disagreeable, that she could not now thoroughly divest herself of the idea that Jane was altered.

The ring at the door was answered by a tall footman, and Katharine was ushered grandly up the great staircase to the morning-room—a very different room from that which she had left on the preceding evening. No traces of boxes, or shavings, or paper; it was astonishing to think how the slow Fanny must have worked, under the influence of the Colonel's eye. And there were the bookshelves in perfect order,—only one gap on the top shelf; but that was sufficient to make Katharine's heart sink a little. But Jane came into the room, and every thing like fear was forgotten. She was looking almost beautiful, a bright glow of pleasure tinging her pale cheek, her soft eyes lighted up with the animation of pure happiness, and her slight and most graceful figure set off to the greatest advantage by the folds of her rich silk dress. Yet she was altered in a way rather to be felt than described; her step, as she entered, was firmer, her manner more self-dependent; she was the mistress of Maplestead. But she was unaltered in her simplicity, her truth, and affection; and when she made Katharine take a place on the sofa beside her, and relate every thing that had happened since she went away, the errand, and the apologies were forgotten, and Katharine talked as fast and as eagerly as if she had been sitting, as in old

times, with Jane Sinclair, in the parlour behind the shop. It was long before they reached the subject of the spoilt book, so much was to be said about affairs of the poor, which concerned them both, and so much of the affairs of Katharine's family, which Jane was interested in hearing; and in the midst of the conversation, just as the important point was reached, Colonel Forbes came in.

It all flashed upon Katharine then in an instant;—that Jane was not the companion of her school-days, the friend who gave her a share of her confidence, but the wife of a man of fortune and position, destined to move in a sphere far above her own; and it flashed upon her too that she was in disgrace, and was come, like a naughty child, to say that she was sorry. If she had not been a little cross with Colonel Forbes, she might have been very much embarrassed. He bowed, stiffly but politely, and then addressed Jane: "I want you, my love; are you ready?"—"I shall be presently; do you want me very much?"—"Stone, the gardener, is ready for us," he said, with an accent of impatience. Katharine felt she was in the way. "I must go," she began, and she rose from her seat; but Jane made her sit down again.—"You have had such a long walk, Katharine, you must have something before you go back. Philip, will you ring the bell?" The Colonel did as he was told, and then came back to Jane's chair, and stood behind it, doing nothing. "Just go out to Stone, and tell him your notions, and then I will come to you," said Jane, looking up at him.—"I can better wait for you, my love."—"Pray don't let me keep you," said Katharine; "I don't want any thing, I assure you, and I am not at all tired. I only wish to say to Colonel Forbes,"—the Colonel was all polite attention,—Katharine felt her colour rise most painfully,—"I am very sorry, and my father is extremely vexed about the book, sir." She grew bolder when she had begun, and went on unhesitatingly: "My father will procure another copy immediately." Colonel Forbes bowed. "You are not troubling yourself about that unfortunate book?" interrupted Jane: "indeed it does not signify in the least, does it, Philip?" But "Philip's" face did not show any signs of agreement. He merely answered, however, in a constrained tone, that if she did not consider it a matter of consequence, of course it was not so. Jane turned round to him with one of her sweetest smiles: "You were fretted because it was a present to me; "but you don't imagine I value the thought less;" and she put her hand in his affectionately. The clouded brow became smooth again.

"It would please my father, and satisfy me to procure another copy on our own account," said Katharine; "and the one which has been injured will sell very well as a second-hand book."—"Oh! no, no," exclaimed Jane; "indeed I can't hear of such a thing, when you were working so kindly for me, and the injury so very trifling as it is; indeed it can't be."—"No, indeed it cannot," observed Colonel Forbes: "I returned the book to Mr. Ashton because it happened to be of no use to me, being injured, and I thought he might sell it; but I meant to have called to-day to explain the matter. I had not the least idea of putting him to any expense."—"It would be very trifling," persisted Katharine, "and I should be more happy."—"Excuse me, Miss Ashton, it cannot be. I think, my dear," and Colonel Forbes turned to his wife, "I think that bell can scarcely have rung."—"I hear some one coming," said Jane, and immediately afterwards the servant entered:—"Bring luncheon for Miss Ashton instantly," was the Colonel's order. "Only a biscuit, if you please," said Katharine, longing to get away. "But that won't be enough," exclaimed Jane; "you must have a sandwich. Bring up some sandwiches as soon as you can."—"And tell Mr. Stone not to wait," said the Colonel, decidedly. "Now, please not, dear Philip," exclaimed Jane, trying not to speak as if she were annoyed; "if you will only go to him, and begin giving your directions, I will be with you in a very few minutes." Colonel Forbes did not revoke his word; and the servant, who had been standing with the handle of the door in his hand, waiting for some certain orders, went away. Jane did then look grave, but not at all angry. She went on talking to Katharine; but she could not prevent herself from showing, by frequent glances at her husband, that her attention was distracted. Colonel Forbes seated himself at a little distance from them, apparently with a view not to disturb them, and took up a book. Katharine could not talk at all now; she could not for a moment forget that he was in the room, and the appearance of the sandwiches was a great relief. Yet she ate scarcely any; certainly not as many as she needed, for it was her dinner-time, and she was very hungry; but though Jane pressed her, and said she had no appetite, Katharine could only be prevailed upon to go through the form of luncheon. When it was over, she fastened her bonnet, took up her gloves, and was about to say good-bye, when it flashed upon her that she had really made no great effort about the book, which was the true object of her visit. She introduced the subject again; and Jane, beginning to understand it better, asked, in great surprise, whether the books had actually

been returned. "Oh ! yes," replied Katharine ; " this morning ; did you not know it ? " — " I ! no, indeed ; the subject was never mentioned to me. Philip ! " — the Colonel laid down his book, and listened — " you don't want really to return the Racine, do you ? — it could have been merely a fancy of the moment. " — " I don't know what fancies of the moment are, " he replied ; " when I do a thing for once I do it for always. " — " But it seems — indeed, I think you are too fanciful. Why should not the book do perfectly well for me ? " — " I wish to have every thing about my wife perfect, " he replied. Jane said nothing more. Colonel Forbes saw that Katharine was vexed, and strove to assure her by the most polite phrases that the affair was a matter of indifference to him, as he could easily procure another copy ; but Katharine could see underneath the surface that it was a sore subject. She was anxious now to go, feeling every moment more uncomfortable. Jane went with her down-stairs, and they stood together talking, for a few seconds, in the hall. Jane's last words were : " I am afraid I must leave my district to you entirely, Katharine, for another fortnight or three weeks, at least ; I shall be so incessantly engaged, and you know I cannot leave Colonel Forbes. " No : Katharine had never felt that necessity so strongly before. " I will settle, as soon as I possibly can, what share I can take in the work ; but I must first see what he wants me to do at home. " Certainly a most wife-like, submissive idea.

Katharine had no fault to find with it ; but — was Jane going to be happy ?

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUESTION for time to decide. But Katharine was by nature very impatient. She could not bear, and she had as yet scarcely learnt that she ought to try to bear, suspense, either for herself or for those she loved. She thought about Jane's prospects all the way home, and put herself, in imagination, in the same situation, and in a great many other situations, some extremely improbable, and none of them, perhaps, such as were likely to befall Jane ; but they were, in Katharine's mind, different phases of married life, and this day she did not feel as she had done when at Moorlands she envied John and Selina. On the contrary, her own lot — its freedom and independence — stood out in brilliant light, compared with what she felt would be the irksomeness of such a perpetual

restraint as that to which Jane submitted so willingly. Love! that, of course, made the difference. Jane loved her husband, and therefore could bear any thing from him. But it was very strange that she should love him, — very strange that she did not see, as Katharine saw, that whether Colonel Forbes followed her wishes or opposed them, petted or thwarted her, it was simply and solely for himself — that his affection for her was but another form of self-love. It was rather frightening to a person looking calmly on to see how another might be deceived, and that other not a silly, frivolous, vain girl, but a sensible, single-hearted, devoted woman. Katharine never felt more anti-matrimonially disposed in her life. She was very much tempted to go home and talk it all over with her mother; but that would be wrong—it would be exciting suspicion, almost betraying confidence—so she resolved not to touch upon the subject, or say one word about her visit beyond what was absolutely necessary, lest she should be led on further than she intended. Katharine's conscientiousness helped her there; she had learnt from it to keep at a safe distance from that which might be even the lightest form of known evil.

Yet it was a considerable comfort to her to find, when she reached home, that she was out of the temptation of saying incautious words just at the moment when her thoughts and her heart were full. Her mother was gone over to Moorlands with Mrs. Fowler, to prepare for John and Selina's reception, early in the next week, and her father was busy in the shop. She took off her things, and sat down to work, liking the rest and quietness very much, and still with an inward self-congratulation that there was no Colonel Forbes to insist upon her going out when she wished to stay in, or to stay in when she desired to go out. That back parlour was a very still, pleasant room; none of the street noises could be heard in it, and Katharine took no notice of the murmur of voices in the shop. She did not even hear a bell ring, so deep was her reverie; and twice there was a knock at the parlour-door before, thinking it was the servant, she said "Come in." The door was opened quietly, and with some doubt even; but it was a man's step which made Katharine look up from her work, and smile and exclaim, "Oh! Mr. Ronaldson, is it you? How you startled me!" It might have been thought that she had startled him, he looked so very ill, so deadly pale. Katharine noticed it, but she did not quite like to ask him what was the matter; and he seated himself, and she went on with her work. "Mrs. Ashton is gone over to Moorlands, I think?" he began. — "Yes, with Mrs. Fowler. John and Selina are to

be at home rather earlier than they intended, so there is a good deal to be done." — "Yes, of course; I thought you might have waited at Maplestead, and returned with them." — "I did not know they were to be at Moorlands, or I should have gone there to meet them," said Katharine; "it would have been better driving home than having that long walk." — "Along the dusty road? yes." — "But it is not at all dusty," exclaimed Katharine, laughing; "you forget the rain we have had lately." — "Oh! yes, I did forget. Did you find Colonel and Mrs. Forbes at Maplestead?" Katharine could with the greatest difficulty keep her countenance; it seemed such an absurd question after their morning meeting. "I thought," she said, "that I told you I was going over on business to them, when I saw you at your aunts' this morning." — "Did you? I think I remember. Yes, I do remember, now. Did you stay long with my aunts after I left you?" — "Longer than I intended," said Katharine; "but there is always so much to say to them, and I was so glad to meet Mrs. Ronaldson there too: it is very seldom we have the pleasure of seeing her." — "No; she goes out very little, not so much as she should. But — I suppose my aunts did not tell you — that" — he hesitated, and his old shy manner returned so painfully, that Katharine felt herself bound, in charity, to assist him. "They told me that we were soon to lose you entirely as a Rilworth person, Mr. Ronaldson. Your friends will be very sorry; but they cannot selfishly wish it otherwise, since the change is to be so much for your advantage." — "My friends!" he repeated, in a tremulous voice; "I can scarcely flatter myself that I have many." — "But those you have — ourselves, for instance, — I am sure we shall miss you very much, Mr. Ronaldson." He looked up quickly, then bent his eyes again upon the ground. Katharine was working steadily and diligently, as if all her interest in life was centred in her mother's new apron, which she was hemming. "I may be alone," he replied; "my mother talks of remaining with my aunts." Katharine looked very much surprised. "It is a long distance for her to travel," he continued; "and I may be obliged to move again before long: the Duke may wish it. My mother is too old to bear the change, unless it is absolutely necessary. Mr. Reeves, too, considers it will be best, at least for a short time, till I am permanently fixed." — "Your mother will join you," said Katharine, in a tone of compassion; "she will never leave you by yourself." He tried to smile, but it was an effort. "I am very sorry for you," said Katharine, gently. — "Are you really sorry, Miss Ashton? it

would be an unspeakable comfort to think so." Something in this speech made Katharine's cheek burn, and her heart beat quick and faint. She was very angry with herself, and the needle went faster than ever. A reply was waited for, and she was obliged to speak. "It would be very strange and unkind of me if I were not to feel for you, Mr. Ronaldson, when you have been with us so much lately, and have been such a help to us. I don't know what my father would have done without you." — "I am very glad to have been of use to Mr. Ashton. I should have been more glad to have been of use to you, Miss Ashton." Katharine could not answer then; her heart grew sick with a conviction of the truth, to which she had shut her eyes. Oh! if she could but stop him!

But it was too late. He walked to the window, and stood for one second silent; then returning to Katharine, he said, with that stern self-command which knows that the very least weakness will be ruin: "Miss Ashton, you once told me that if I had any thing to say to you, I might say it plainly, without reserve. I am going to leave Rilworth, to form a new home; it will be no home to me, unless" — he took her hand eagerly, and his voice sank almost to a whisper, as he added, "Would you, could you share it with me?" Katharine withdrew her hand, and her cheek became perfectly colourless. She turned away, and tears rushed to her eyes. "Oh! Mr. Ronaldson," she exclaimed, "why did you ask?" — "Because life's happiness depends on the answer," was the reply. Katharine leant her head upon her hands: her whole frame trembled with agitation. How many, many thoughts, hopes, dreams of happiness, rushed as a torrent through her mind! Yet she looked up again, and answered firmly: "Do not be angry with me; it cannot be." He leant for support against a chair, but he did not speak. "I could not be untrue," continued Katharine, gathering courage; "I could not feign feelings which I have not." — "Feign! no: Heaven forbid! but, oh! Miss Ashton" — and his voice became broken and hollow — "is it quite? — are you so very sure?" — "Very sure," interrupted Katharine; "very certain, that for your happiness and for mine, the subject must never be mentioned again." He seemed as if he scarcely understood her meaning; his eyes were fixed, his lips blanched. "It would be so wrong to deceive you," continued Katharine; "it is so much better to say the whole truth at once." — "Yes; better, indeed, if — but, Katharine — let me call you Katharine this once," — and as he turned aside his head, Katharine saw a tear roll slowly down his cheek, — "to have

cherished a hope for months and months; to have thought of it at first as a vague dream for the end of life; to have had it fostered and nurtured; — unconsciously indeed, — I feel, I know now that it was unconsciously, — but still to have had it nurtured; and suddenly, at the very moment when the power of realising it is put within my reach, and all whom I best love and honour sanction my choice, to feel that it is a delusion — a nothing — that life must henceforth be a dark, lonely journey! — “Not dark and lonely, I trust,” interrupted Katharine, kindly; “you will find some other far better than I am, far more deserving of your affection.” — “Thank you,” he replied, with a pained look, which went like a dagger to Katharine’s heart. — “It is very cold in me — very unkind; I feel it is,” she exclaimed; “but, Mr. Ronaldson, would it not be more unkind to mislead you? Must it not be infinitely better to endure any suffering now, than to wake up, when it would be too late, to the knowledge that one had made a mistake?” — “That could never be with me,” he said quietly. — “Forgive me,” replied Katharine, “if your affection were not returned, it must be, and” — “You would never be able to return it,” he added. Again a tear gathered in his eye, and was kept back only by the effort of his strong will. Katharine’s heart smote her. So good, so clever, so superior in education and principle, why could she not love him? For one instant she thought of herself as his wife, — home, friends, associations, all gone from her, — his wife! no one besides to look to, to lean upon, — and her heart sank. It was a sufficient answer to satisfy her conscience. “Mr. Ronaldson,” she said, “if any pain which I could bear would save you pain, I would take it thankfully; whatever it might be, it seems that it would be less than what I now feel; but the sorrow you may endure at this moment will pass — the sorrow which you would have to endure if, feeling as I do, I were to consent to be your wife, would never pass.” — “Not if it were impossible for you to change,” he replied; “but there have been, — I have heard of such cases myself, — I have known persons whose feelings were as nothing at the beginning, yet who have been won by devotion — long, lingering, steadfast devotion; and, Katharine, were it to be at the price of the labour of my life, were it to be only the reward of my death-bed, the happiness of knowing you were mine would be cheaply purchased.”

“If I could be yours in heart,” said Katharine, thoughtfully. He read something of hope in her manner; he heard, or fancied he heard it in her tone; and earnestly, beseechingly, he implored her to give him but the trial, to suffer him to write to her, to

think of her, to leave her free as air, but to consider himself bound, as indeed he ever must be. It would be the support, the guiding star of his life. And Katharine listened, and trembled, and felt weak, oh! very, very weak—so weak that, if a clergyman had been at hand, she would almost have consented to marry him on the spot, to save herself the pain of refusing; but the same vision of home given up for him came before her again, and, terrified at the influence which compassion, she felt, was beginning to exercise over her judgment, she turned shudderingly from him, and entreated him to leave her.

Her manner was such, then, as to admit of no hope. "It is enough," he replied; and something of a man's wounded pride at being rejected mingled with the tone in which he spoke: "I will never intrude the subject upon you a second time."—"We part friends, Mr. Ronaldson," said Katharine, giving him her hand. He took it, and pressed it to his lips: "We shall not meet again, Katharine. Pardon me—Miss Ashton always from henceforth." A wintry smile curled his lips; he could scarcely add, "God bless you." Katharine pressed his hand warmly, but she could not trust herself to reply; and when the door closed behind him, she rushed to her chamber, and, kneeling by her bedside, burst into an agony of tears.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FIVE years have passed. There is a change in Rilworth—a change in its inhabitants: old houses have been taken down, new ones have been built; the market-place has been enlarged; the Mechanics' Institution removed from Corn-street into High-street; Mr. Andrews, the retired auctioneer, is dead, and Mr. George Andrews is said to have greatly increased his fortune by entering into some extensive manufacturing speculations, consistent with his anxious desire to live at the same time as a private gentleman. Mr. Lane, too, is dead, and Mr. George Lane, his son, has succeeded him in his business. The Miss Lanes and their mamma have a small cottage, about half a mile from the town, and may be seen every day walking up and down the raised foot-path on the London-road, with their friend, Miss Andrews. Mr. Madden has met with great misfortunes, and the family pride is so reduced that Mr. Henry Madden has entered Mr. Ashton's shop, in the hope of one day being his partner. Mr. Dobson has prospered

so much that his little china shop has become a repository for Bohemian glass and ornamental china. Mr. Carter, too, has contrived to metamorphose his long dark passage, between narrow counters, into a splendid show-room, hung with shawls magnificent in hue and soft in texture, mantillas tempting to every taste, ribbons of all the colours of the rainbow, and silks which a queen might envy. Miss Dyer has enlarged her business in the lace department, and hangs white veils, and berthes, and polkas, upon tall stands in the downstairs apartment; whilst Mr. Green, the jeweller, has attached a fancy bazaar to his former insignificant business, and sells useless fineries, and charitable luxuries, at as dear a rate as any monopolist in a half-fledged watering place.

And there are changes less seen, less thought of; it may be, in the eyes of many, less important. Poverty, and sorrow, and sickness, have done their work in the back streets and the dark courts and alleys of Rilworth. Vagabond boys have ripened into early profligates; girlish vanity and the constant sight of evil have tainted to the very heart's core those whose childhood promised innocence; mothers' hearts have sickened, and their strength has failed under the burden of the daily calls for help which they could not give; fathers have grown reckless, or given themselves up to moody apathy, because in their youth they had never been taught upon Whom to cast their care; and souls have departed from this world to carry the account of their stewardship before their God, and to learn, what before they never would believe, that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." It is a sad view, but a true one. There is another brighter, and not less true. Evil meets us upon the surface, goodness instinctively shrinks from display.

There has been much good in Rilworth during these last five years. No parish could be under the influence of a man, sensible, hard-working, devoted as Mr. Reeves, and not derive good from it. He might not be faultless; his manner might be quick, his temper inclined to impatience, his sermons might not be exciting, his plans not always formed in perfect wisdom; but he was earnest, sincerely earnest, in thought, and word, and action: and when all other powers have been tried, and failed, it will be found that earnestness is the fulcrum upon which to rest the moral lever that is to raise the world.

And so there are comforting spots in Rilworth, even in those back streets and crowded alleys. There are sufferers lingering in mortal disease, yet uttering no word of repining; children

practising at home the lessons which care and love have taught them at school. There are grateful hearts and grateful prayers for the kindness which, winter after winter, has provided protection against the inclemency of the weather. There are struggles against temptation endured bravely, and ending victoriously, because the clergyman's warning has been given, and his words, through the mercy of God, have sunk deep into the memory, and been recalled in the hour of trial. And there are many, various in age, and differing in degree, working, under regular guidance, with a common motive, a common hope, even that they may one day listen rejoicingly to the words, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

One there is to be seen almost daily, walking slowly and thoughtfully by the respectable houses in Woodgate-street, threading the intricacies of Briton's-court, looking anxiously at the dingy cottages in Long-lane. She knows every child by name; she has a word for every bustling woman, or sickly girl; her knock is answered almost before it can be heard, for many are looking out for her, to give them a word of comfort or advice; and few indeed there are who would repel her even with a cold answer, none who would treat her even with a word of incivility. Five years ago Katharine Ashton's cheek was bright with the first vividness of youth and hope: there is a slight deadness upon it now. The colour is softened and less changing; the eye is still very quick, but words are uttered less rapidly. She laughs cheerfully when there is a cause, but she has lost the childish lightness of heart which could laugh at seeming nothings. She was never, strictly speaking, pretty; but youthful spirits, and kindness, and intelligence, often made her attractive; and she is attractive still, though in a different way. The gleam of thoughtfulness which once came fitfully over her mind, has become its settled inhabitant. She has learnt something from reading, much from observation, more from the teaching of her own experience. Life is a mystery; but she holds in her hand the key that is to solve it; for the balance between earth and heaven, once decided by duty, is now weighed down by love;—and power, and energy, and affections, are devoted where they can never be devoted in vain.

We will look at her whilst she sits, as in the old times, at the breakfast-table, in the back parlour, with her father and mother. Very little changed that parlour is; there are the old curtains, the old carpet, the old book-case, the same table with the blue and white breakfast-set, the same old-fashioned milk-jug, and gro-

tesque sugar-tongs. The carpet, indeed, is faded, but it has been covered with a drugget of nearly the same colour, so that the difference is not remarked; and, though Mrs. Ashton says that the leathern arm-chair, in which her husband sleeps so comfortably every evening, is nearly worn into holes by the constant pressure of his head and the rubbing of his elbows, yet there is no talk of purchasing another, for Katharine has spent some leisure moments in knitting a covering for it, and Mr. Ashton declares in consequence that it will serve his purpose for twenty years to come. He is fond of that expression; perhaps it strengthens him against a secret misgiving, and makes him feel more sure that he really has twenty years more of life to come. Why should he not have? His intellect is clear, his step steady, his pulse regular, his appetite good. He has passed but fifty-seven years in the world, and the men of this generation are often known to live far beyond the three score years and ten of the Psalmist. Mrs. Ashton is perhaps more altered than her husband. Her hair has become very grey, and that makes a great change in a woman. "Old Mrs. Ashton," she is sometimes called. That may be only in contradistinction to her gay daughter-in-law; but it may be also, for the term is sometimes used by strangers, because she is really looking old, anxious, less able to cope with the difficulties of life. But all these are outward changes: they are of very little consequence. Katharine could not smile so pleasantly, and talk so unreservedly and happily, if all were as it once was within. The eagerness of youth, and the steady purpose of age, cannot, indeed, meet on all points; but Katharine has much more sympathy now on the subjects nearest her heart than she ever had before; and if Mr. Ashton cannot entirely give up his suspicions of district societies, and Mrs. Ashton cannot always see why Katharine should care nothing for amusement, like other young persons of her age, they are both in heart conscious that there is very much in the past for which to lament, and are desirous, heartily desirous, as far as in them lies, to place their influence in the scale of good.

"Mother," said Katharine—she might have made precisely the same speech, in precisely the same tone, five years before—"shall you and I go over to Moorlands this afternoon?"—"Well, I don't know, Kitty; I hadn't thought about it."—"Selly might be glad to have us, for little Clara is fretful with cutting her teeth, and the baby keeps her awake at night."—"And Master Johnnie takes advantage of nurse being engaged, to set up a commotion in the nursery, I'll venture to say," added Mr. Ashton. "What a fellow that is for spirit!"—"Rather too much so,"

observed Katharine; "he wears Selina out."—"Because she is such a bad manager, my dear," replied Mrs. Ashton.—"I can't think what she is to do when those children grow up, if they are so unmanageable now they are young."—"They will go to school and be flogged into obedience," said Mr. Ashton; "that is the only thing to be done with them. But, wife, if you go over to Moorlands, what am I to do?"—"Drive over in the chaise at six o'clock, and you will be there just in time for tea," said Mrs. Ashton.—"And leave all my affairs to young Madden?" said Mr. Ashton; "one good thing is, he has a capital head for figures."—"Oh! yes," said Katharine, "he will do quite well; and the hope of being partner some day will be sure to make him attentive."—"That is a long day to come, though," said Mr. Ashton, with an air of consideration; "but certainly, if he is ever to do any thing by himself, he must begin practising. So you think, Kitty, I may dispense with the shop for this evening, and find my way over to Moorlands?"—"Certainly," said Katharine, smiling; "there is nothing to hinder you, and I think, somehow, father, that Moorlands wants you even more than the shop."—"Maybe," replied Mr. Ashton, and a shade passed over his face, and he was silent for an instant. Then he added abruptly: "Has John heard from Charlie Ronaldson, do you know?"—"I don't think he has," replied Katharine: "he wants to hear dreadfully."—Mr. Ashton rose up from the breakfast-table, and went to the door of the shop. "Wife," he said, turning round, "tell John he mustn't conclude that bargain for the new threshing-machine till Ronaldson writes."—"Very well," was the reply; but Mrs. Ashton had noticed that all was not "very well," and she remarked it to Katharine when the door was shut.—"I wish, Kate," she said, "that Charlie could find time to run down. He has never been here once since he went away, in spite of all the interest he seems to take in Moorlands. It would be twenty times better than writing. He would see into the state of affairs at once, and I don't think your father quite understands it."—"No," said Katharine, "I don't think he does; but, mother, I shouldn't like to be the person to tell him so."—"It was always his fancy—farming," continued Mrs. Ashton: "I thought, how it would be when Moorlands was taken; yet it has been a wonder to me for the last twelvemonth that he should allow John to go on with it. But I suppose Selly's at the bottom of it, she won't think of leaving the place."—"Perhaps so," was Katharine's reply; she did not trust herself to speak of Selina.—"And if Charlie Ronaldson could but come here," continued Mrs. Ashton, "he would give your father good advice,

and he and John both would listen to him. I do wish he would come; but there is no chance of that, I suppose, till after he's married." Mrs. Ashton sighed. Katharine knew the sigh, and its meaning. She kissed her mother, and almost immediately afterwards left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Yes, Mrs. Ashton sighed now. She had not sighed five years before, when Katharine told her that she had refused to be the wife of Charles Ronaldson. Katharine was very young then, and life was bright, and Northumberland was far off, and three hundred a-year was nothing so very wonderfully tempting in the way of income. There might be many more advantageous offers for Katharine, and she might settle near Rilworth, as John had done; so Mrs. Ashton was very kind and contented, and persuaded her husband that Katharine must know her own mind best, and that there were other persons in the world quite as good and with even better prospects than young Ronaldson; and Mr. Ashton also, in his good humour and good nature, took the affair very quietly, and was only thankful that his Kitty was not going away from him to settle in the wilds, as he considered them, of a northern county.

But times were changed since then; Katharine was five years older, and though she had had several other offers, none had approved themselves, either to herself or her parents; and business affairs were not as satisfactory as they had been, for John schemed and speculated at Moorlands, and made his father pay for the speculations. Selina, too, received very little help from her own family, and came upon Mr. Ashton for endless expenses—doctor's bills, children's dresses, things which she said, and said truly, it was impossible to do without, only, as Katharine sometimes thought to herself, if Selina would but keep from expenses which were avoidable, she would never be distressed for those which were unavoidable.

But be this as it may, expenses certainly did increase, and money to meet them did not, and Mrs. Ashton cast many an anxious look to the future, not for herself, but for her children; and when she heard that Charles Ronaldson was doing well in the north, making an income not of three, but of five hundred a-year, and that his mother, who had gone to live with him, had a

pretty home, and every comfort and even luxury of life about her, and was known to have but one wish, that her son should be happily married, it is not strange that she should sigh, and, forgetting what her own personal loss would have been, think, with something like cross regret, that if Katharine had chosen it, all this might have been her own.

But Mrs. Ashton's sighs were not the important matter. Did Katharine sigh likewise? Human nature is very perverse; that which we reject when within our reach is often lamented as a loss when we have cast it from us. Yet this would not be a true description of Katharine's feelings. She did not regret or lament at all at first, except on Charles Ronaldson's account; she had done what she believed to be right and honest-minded—she had no feeling for him beyond that of respect, and she had no idea that she could ever change. If she had allowed him to write to her, to visit her, to pay her the attentions which he would have desired, even while leaving her nominally free, he must have been encouraged to hope, and Katharine at the time had no hope. The more she had seen of him the more she had learned to be afraid of him: she could not talk freely and happily to him, his mind seemed so much beyond hers; it was only by a mental strain that she could reach up to him; and the thought of this continued effort for life, to her, who had been free as air in thought and word, and almost in action, was unendurable.

But a mind like Katharine's grows very rapidly, especially when there is a daily labour of self-cultivation. At nineteen she did not understand Charles Ronaldson; she liked him very much, she thought him very superior, but at the same time extremely alarming. She was pleased to hear others talk to him, but she never wished to talk herself. At four and twenty she felt that if she could see him she could say things to him which she could not say to any other person;—that was, always supposing he was unchanged, and this there was little reason to doubt. His kindness of heart certainly was as great as ever. Even though living at such a distance, he was John's chief adviser and help, and his sympathy with all their family trials was apparently increased. Katharine often felt that if he were at hand to be consulted by word, as well as by letter, she should have little fear of any blunders being committed by either John or her father. She had learned to look upon him as their great stay, for she found that whenever his opinion was set aside disaster was sure to follow; yet still it would not be true to say that even now she repented the decision which had separated them. It was im-

possible to regret that which at the moment had been right. Neither did her thoughts turn to him with any thing like affection. She would have been well pleased to hear that he was married to another—at least she said so to herself, whenever his prospects were talked of; and if the shadow of a contrary feeling crossed her mind, it was only a shadow, a something which she did not realise to herself, it was so slight, and so transient.

And so Katharine did not echo her mother's sigh now, save for her mother's sake. The news that Charles Ronaldson was to be married had reached them only a few days before. It was a report brought by Mr. Henry Madden, from London. How it reached London no one knew, and the event was so probable, that no one thought of inquiring. The lady was said to be rich and young, and her name was Smith. That opened a wide field for conjecture. The Miss Ronaldsons professed to know nothing about the matter for certain, though they had heard there was a Miss Smith living in their nephew's neighbourhood; but they were old ladies, who were supposed to have learned, by the experience of upwards of sixty years, to keep their own counsel; and so it was an acknowledged fact at Rilworth that Miss Smith was to be Mrs. Ronaldson.

But Katharine did sigh, though not for Charles Ronaldson. She thought of John, and Selina, and the wilful little Clara, and the unmanageable Johnnie, and the fretful, sickly, tiny baby, who seemed almost smothered by his grand name of Constantine. The evils which she had dreaded in the far distance seemed coming very near. John was sanguine of ultimate success, and Mr. Ashton was very unwilling to acknowledge that the farming scheme was a failure; and when things went wrong, Katharine was always told that the season had been bad, or that political causes had burdened the agricultural interest; but politics and the seasons influenced other farmers likewise, and yet they were not like John, always behindhand with their rent, always wanting ready money for present outlay. She could do no good by fears and complaints, so she said nothing; and, true to her principles of usefulness, only tried to better the condition of the family by her own care and diligence. But a visit to Moorlands was never a pleasant prospect. Selina was dependent upon her in various ways, and therefore, for her own sake, was tolerably kind; and John, beginning to feel the value of his sister as his opinion of his wife decreased, always gave her a hearty welcome; but it was no holiday to Katharine to be there. She was generally engaged in the morning in helping to settle John's accounts, and

hearing all his troubles, and giving him what advice she could to help him in his difficulties; and in the afternoon Selina took advantage of her being there to leave the children to her care whilst she drove into Rilworth to pay gossiping visits: and in the evening there were baskets-full of children's clothes to be looked over and mended, and Katharine worked diligently at darning and stitching till ten o'clock, whilst Selina generally spent her time at the manufacture of some new piece of finery, and John fell asleep in his arm-chair.

And what was to be the end of all this? Katharine was learning not to ask or think, but to suffer herself to be led on day by day, looking only at the step before her. Yet sometimes, and so it happened on this day, the mist over the future seemed to float away, and show only greater gloom beyond.

She prepared to walk over to Moorlands after packing up several little useful things to be brought over by Mr. Ashton in the chaise in the afternoon. The chaise was one of the luxuries consequent upon Moorlands; Mr. Ashton had felt himself obliged to have one as soon as his son lived in the country. Mrs. Ashton talked of remaining at Moorlands for a day or two, and Katharine knew that she would probably be expected to do the same. They could not live at John's expense; so their own larder was emptied, and a ham, a new cheese, and some jam and marmalade for the children, were put aside, and half-a-dozen bottles of wine taken out of the cellar—not that it was supposed that Mrs. Ashton and Katharine would eat and drink to the same amount, but it was helping poor John, and upon this principle the Moorlands visits were always carried on in a lavish scale. Katharine would have no objection to this, but that similar generosity was never shown by any of Mr. Fowler's family, who, on the contrary, were generally invited to dine immediately afterwards, and entertained at Mr. Ashton's cost.

"If it was for any good!" thought Katharine to herself, whilst searching in the cellar for a bottle of choice port wine, which Mr. Ashton had particularly begged might be sent over; "but it will not save them in the least. There will be a great dinner given after we are gone, and the port wine will be drunk by Mr. Fowler and George Andrews. Oh! the marriage!"—an ejaculation which was perpetually rising in her mind, though it never escaped her lips.

"I am ready, Kitty, my dear," called out Mrs. Ashton from the head of the stairs, whilst Katharine was still in the cellar. "Coming, mother, directly. Susan, where's the wine basket?"

Mind you don't forget to keep it in a cool place, and to put it in the chaise by and bye, and the ham ; it ought to be taking coals to Newcastle," she added to herself ; "but that's not the case, unfortunately." Mrs. Ashton came down the stairs. "I have been thinking, Kate, that that striped gingham of yours would cut up very well into frocks for Clara and baby. Wouldn't it be a good opportunity of taking it over and helping to make them?"—"Yes, if they are to have it, mother," said Katharine, laughing ; "but I have not quite made up my mind to part with it."—"Oh ! nonsense, child ; the dress is as old as the hills, and Selly said only on Saturday, when she was here, what a bill she was running up at Carter's for the children ; it would save her a world of trouble and expense."—"But if I am obliged to have a new dress to replace it, there won't be much saving," said Katharine.—"Not to you, child, but to poor John ; and you know he wants it so much, and your father will be sure to give you half-a-dozen new dresses if you ask him."—"The poor little things are welcome enough to the old gingham, I am sure," said Katharine ; "but, mother, I don't think it is a good plan to let Selly feel that she has only to mention a thing and she has it ; and her own family ought to do something for her, they don't really help at all."—"It is not for Selly, it's for poor John," said Mrs. Ashton ; "he is so pressed for money just now ; and he will be in a fever if he finds a long bill from Carter's coming in for the children's clothes."—"One might as well buy them new frocks," said Katharine ; "it would be as cheap." But Mrs. Ashton exclaimed vehemently, "Buy new dresses ! no ! that would be an extravagance. A cast-off dress like the striped gingham is all very well ; but if we are to be always buying new dresses for the children, we shall be ruined." Katharine considered for a moment whether it were worth while to debate the point, and having made up her mind that it would be practicable to give up the dress to the children and do without a new one herself, she brought it down and put it with the other valuables which were to be taken over to Moorlands in the chaise. Mrs. Ashton was satisfied then ; and having twice looked round the larder to see that there was nothing else which could be spared, set off for her walk.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was a very hot, dusty day. Katharine had seldom been so tired; and by the time they reached Moorlands she had a very bad headache. They arrived just at dinner-time. Selina was standing in the porch looking out for the chance of visitors. She was handsome still, but it was a beauty which had lost every real charm. Her complexion was faded, and she had grown stout and coarse-looking; and her showy gown, and the cap with artificial flowers, at one o'clock in the day, gave Katharine a shock as she came in sight of her, though she had long been accustomed to see the same thing. "How d'ye do, my dear?" said Mrs. Ashton, kissing her; "how's John? and where are the children?"—"John is about somewhere, I believe," said Selina, carelessly, and the children, I hope, are asleep; they have been rioting in the drawing-room till they are tired out."—"Then I hope Clara is not very bad with her teeth," observed Katharine.—"Oh! yes, she is; as bad as bad can be. Papa was over here yesterday, and he says that if we don't take care she will have fits; but there's no doing any thing with her, she won't take medicine." Katharine did not say that she ought to be made to do it, but it was put down in her memory as one of her own duties to see that direction enforced. "It's tremendously hot, isn't it?" said Selina, leaning against the porch; "there isn't a breath of fresh air, and there's John hard at work in the hay-field; I wonder how he bears it."—"Very well, I should think," said Katharine; "with the prospect of a good crop."—"Oh! as for that," said Selina, "he is so terribly down-hearted, I don't think he cares whether it is a good crop or a bad. We have had the Colonel here this morning."—"Colonel Forbes?" asked Katharine.—"Why, yes, Kate? what other Colonel is there to have? But won't you come up in the drawing-room? It is all in a little, but you won't mind that." They went up-stairs, stumbling upon a dustpan in the way, which made Selina begin a complaint of the new maid, who was, she said, as dull as a post, and as obstinate as a pig. Katharine did not inquire more minutely into her demerits, she was so anxious to hear more of Colonel Forbes's visit. Possibly Selina was not equally willing to tell, for when they went into the drawing-room she devoted her attention entirely to the state of the room, bemoaning her hard fate in having children who would leave broken toys on the

floor, romp upon the sofa, put the chairs out of their places, and strum upon the piano when her back was turned. "That's master Johnnie's doing," she said, striking a cracked note; "I found him at it directly after breakfast. There he was perched upon the stool, and hammering with all his might. If he has been told once he has been told fifty times not to touch the piano."—"Why don't you keep it locked, my dear?" said Mrs. Ashton.—"Why, there's no use in it, then," replied Selina; "I always put it open, with music upon it, for look's sake." Katharine could not help smiling, though not a very happy smile. How many things at Moorlands were done for "look's sake!"—"And now tell us, Selly," said Mrs. Ashton, when after collecting the toys, arranging the chairs, and smoothing the sofa cushions, something like an appearance of neatness had been restored, "what did the Colonel say this morning?"—"You had better ask John," replied Selina, still moving about the room, and picking up shreds of paper and thread from the carpet, as if seized with a mania for tidiness; "he is not so over-communicative to me."—"John, or the Colonel?" inquired Katharine.—"Why, both of them," replied Selina; "and yet I think there is something due to me," she added, bridling her head, "if it's only from respect to my father, who has attended the Colonel and his family for these six years or more. He might have paid me the compliment of at least talking the matter over with me. And John to be so close! I can't bear it, and I vow I won't bear it; it's too bad."—"But what is the matter, my dear," said Mrs. Ashton; "here, come and sit down," and she pointed to the sofa; "just rest yourself, and don't flurry, and tell us what it is. Ten to one but Mr. Ashton will find some way of helping poor John out of his scrape if he has got into one."—"Yes, it's all done for John," exclaimed Selina, indignantly; "poor John, indeed! and nobody thinks of me, slaving from morning till night with the children, and no maid, or as good as none, and not able to go and see a friend, or ask a friend to come and see me. I, who was brought up with such different expectations!"—"But if you would tell us about Colonel Forbes," asked Katharine, quietly, but with an evident anxiety in her tone.—"Well, then, there's nothing to tell," said Selina impatiently, "only the Colonel is going to raise the rent, and if so John says we can't stay." Mrs. Ashton's countenance changed, and Katharine said, gravely, "That's a serious matter; I suppose, indeed, you can't stay then."—"And why not? I should like to know," exclaimed Selina. "Here we have got a good house over our heads, and a garden, flower-garden

and kitchen-garden both, and we have done loads to the place, actually spent a fortune upon it; and what right has Colonel Forbes to raise the rent?" Not very logical reasoning, as Katharine perceived; but she replied to the most obvious meaning of the remark: "As to spending a fortune, Selina, you must remember that you have been paying diminished rent up to this time on account of having spent so much."—"Yes, nominally; as if the difference of rent would make up for all we have done! Why, there are the outhouses, and all the offices, and the new day-nursery, and the greenhouse."—"I suppose Colonel Forbes will say that the day-nursery and the greenhouse were fancies of your own," replied Katharine. "You know, it was never imagined they would be necessary at first."—"That means that I ought not to have a drawing-room," said Selina; "I who had been used to one all my life. It may be very well for you to talk, Katharine, bred up, as you were, in a back parlour, and never accustomed to any thing else; but it's different with me, I'll assure you." Katharine suffered the angry feeling to exhaust itself in a toss of the head, and only replied, "I suppose it is no use to trouble ourselves now as to what was or was not necessary; but I am afraid it is plain that if Colonel Forbes does raise the rent it will be impossible for you to stay, or at least to live as you do now."—"And what do you mean us to do then?" inquired Selina.—"Of course I can't say; it is for you to decide; but I should have thought you might find some smaller place; or if this was not desirable, it would be necessary, I suppose, to retrench here."—"A smaller place!" exclaimed Selina, putting away from her the disagreeable idea of retrenchment; "why this is not large enough for us."—"Not when we all come and take possession of it," replied Katharine, trying to smile. "But you know, Selina, you are not bound to be so hospitable."—"That won't do, my dear," observed Mrs. Ashton, decidedly. "Your father never will approve of John's having a place which won't take him in, and where he can't see the children."—"And I'm sure John won't approve of it either," added Selina. "He is always saying that he can't get on without his father's opinion, and that he wishes that he was living with him. And as for the children, they would break their hearts; Johnnie wakes up sometimes now in the night, and calls for grandpapa."—"But, my dear Selina," observed Katharine, "all these are very fair reasons, if the question were one of choice; but if you can't afford it, there is no choice."—"Only, I suppose," muttered Selina, as if rather ashamed of what she was saying, "that if we consult your father's

pleasure in staying here, he will consult our pockets by helping us with the rent." Katharine felt so extremely angry, that she would not allow herself to reply directly, and before she could speak, Mrs. Ashton had interposed her word; "To be sure, my dear, that seems but fair, and an easy way of settling the matter, if Mr. Ashton can afford it."—"Yes, if he can," said Katharine, quietly. Selina turned round upon her rather sharply: "Why, you know, Katharine, it won't be a question of more than twenty or thirty pounds a year, and it is absurd to say that a man with a business like his can't afford that."—"Yet even then it might not be desirable to remain," said Katharine, "if the place is too expensive."—"I don't know what you mean by a place being too expensive," replied Selina; "we must eat and drink, and the children must be clothed, wherever we are." Katharine would not argue the point; she knew it was worse than useless, and looking at her watch, asked if it was not dinner-time? "Yes, all but—that is, it ought to be; but I suppose Nancy won't be ready, she never is. I wish, Katharine, as you go upstairs, you would step into the nursery, and tell nurse to go down and help her a little; and perhaps you will take your bonnet off there, and just stay and watch the children." Katharine went; angry with herself for the inclination she felt to refuse whatever Selina asked; and there she remained for nearly half an hour, nurse taking advantage of the liberty given her to transact a little business for herself, instead of helping the other maid. When, at length, Katharine went downstairs, taking little Clara with her, pouting and crying in the wretchedness of having just waked up from sleep, she found the badly dressed dinner half-cold; but such things were but trifles; a much more important manner was John's grave face, and his unusual silence, which Katharine and her mother vainly endeavoured to break. Katharine could not go out again that afternoon, Selina kept her fully employed; but she was pleased when five o'clock arrived, and she could listen for the wheels of her father's chaise. From him she always had an attentive hearing for whatever she might say, and there was a great satisfaction in feeling that he had a confidence in her judgment. True, she had never yet ventured to try it too far, by thwarting his favourite notions; but this day she resolved to be bold, and discuss with him openly the advantages and disadvantages of keeping John at Moorlands. That there were advantages she was quite willing to acknowledge. If John undertook a new farm he might be obliged to lay out more money upon it, and Moorlands, as it was, suited him in every thing but the ex-

pensés, which were principally incurred by Selina. These would be the same everywhere. If she could be persuaded to give up her greenhouse, and her fine dresses and parties, and work for her children! But that was a hopeless wish, and Katharine, as she thought of the future, felt more desponding than ever. When the children were gone to their tea, and Mrs. Ashton and Selina were having a little conversation about Rilworth matters in the drawing-room, Katharine walked down the lane alone. It was an extremely beautiful evening, and the country was looking lovely, the trees luxuriant in foliage, and the fields about the farm and the glades of the park at Maplestead glittering in lines of yellow light. Katharine felt that she was very fond of Moorlands, notwithstanding its annoyances. It had become full of associations, not all pleasant, yet resting-places for memory, and recalling many thoughts and resolutions which were eventful epochs in her own mental history. She felt that she should be very sorry to have no more interest in the place, especially sorry for her father. He had, in a great measure, made it what it was, and it had given him many hours of pleasant and innocent relaxation. Katharine valued them for him even more than he could value them for himself. She saw how they soothed any irritable feelings aroused by business, and awakened his mind to better and holier thoughts than were suggested in the bustling influence of Rilworth. The Sundays in the country had been especially pleasant to him, and Katharine felt now how much there would be to regret in the quiet walks which they had lately often taken together, and which had given her a satisfaction never so fully realised as then, when she thought she might be about to lose them. But one blessing she had derived from them which nothing could take away,—she understood her father better, and he understood her; he had grown younger, as it were, under the influence of her simple earnestness and loving faith. Hopes and wishes,—the bright hopes and purer wishes of innocent and holy childhood,—had sprung up again in the heart of the shrewd, hard-working, yet always kind-hearted and upright man of the world; and these were never likely to be buried again, whatever might be the outward circumstances of his condition. All this Katharine felt deeply, and most thankfully; she did not see the share which had been permitted to herself in the work, for the direct influence she attributed to Mr. Reeves; and certainly there was much for which she was indebted to him: but from whatever cause the alteration arose, it made her much happier in her home, and caused her to look with regret upon the prospect of any change

that might interrupt the peaceful intercourse with her father which she had lately enjoyed.

And the glorious beech woods of Maplestead brought another regret. Katharine felt it, as she caught a glimpse of the house through the trees, and saw the sun's rays lighting up the large window of the morning-room, where Jane was probably at that moment sitting. A keen sharp pang it was, — the sting of many mingled feelings ; affection, and disappointment, and vague foreboding anxieties ; but she had no leisure to analyse them ; her father's chaise turned into the lane ; and calling to a boy to take the horse, Mr. Ashton alighted and walked with her towards the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THAT evening Colonel Forbes and Jane were alone in the drawing-room at Maplestead ; an unusual occurrence. They were very seldom alone now. Colonel Forbes was the member for Rilworth, and parliamentary interests made sad inroads upon domestic comfort. He was just what he had been five years before ; Jane was thinner — paler she could not well be. She was working — ornamenting a frock for her little boy — she could not work for the poor in the drawing-room, her husband did not like it. Colonel Forbes was reading the newspaper. It was a very warm evening, and Jane leant back in her chair and seemed oppressed by the heat. Presently she stood up and opened the window. The Colonel looked up from his paper : "It is very cold, my dear ; are you obliged to have that window open ?" — "Oh, no, not at all," and the window was closed, and Jane sat down again and went on with her work. "Is there any thing interesting in the papers, Philip ?" — "Nothing that will interest you, my dear." He read it for another ten minutes in silence, then tossed it aside, and throwing his head back in his chair, closed his eyes. Jane took up the paper. Public matters always attracted her now for her husband's sake. She liked to read the leading article in "The Times ;" and she turned over the huge sheets to find it. The Colonel opened his eyes : "Are you obliged to make that rustling, Jane ?" — "Oh ! no, not if it disturbs you." The paper was put down softly, and Jane returned diligently to her work. The time-piece struck half-past ten. Jane looked very worn ; she had not been at all strong lately.

She began putting up her work, and accidentally moved so as to awake her husband. He started up: "Bed-time, Jane! it can't be."—"Yes, indeed it is," said Jane, smiling, and pointing to the time-piece. "It is only a quarter-past by my watch," said the Colonel, "and I wanted to talk to you." Jane sat down instantly. "I must be off to London to-morrow."—"Again!" and Jane tried very hard not to let the silly tears come into her eyes.—"I shall not be gone long," he continued; "not more than a week or ten days. You must really try, Jane, not to fret about it in this way. You know I cannot help it."—"Oh! no," exclaimed Jane; "of course I know you can't help it; but, dear Philip, you must not be vexed with me for wishing not to lose you."—"Of course not, my love; no one dreams of being vexed with you, only you know I don't like sorrowful faces. What I wanted to say to you was, that I have been talking to young Ashton to-day about his farm, and that if his sister comes to you at all about it, you must not give her any hope of my changing my determination."—"Very well," replied Jane, in a quiet voice, and keeping her eyes fixed upon the ground. "I don't want to be hard," continued the Colonel, in an apologetic tone, "but I can't be ruining myself for a man who goes against me in every thing. If old Ashton will join himself to the Maddens and their set, he must not expect me to put myself out of my way to keep his son at Moorlands."—"I don't think he has any object in what he is doing," observed Jane; "he has been talked over into being a Protectionist, but I really don't believe he has any decided opinions upon the subject."—"That may or may not be, my dear; it will not alter my determination, and therefore I wish to hear no excuses." Jane shrank into herself; she dared not thwart him by arguing the point. "The Duke and myself have agreed that we must make a stand upon the question," continued Colonel Forbes; "I shall see the Duke in London, and when he comes home we are to have some meetings at the Castle."—"At which you won't want me, I suppose," said Jane, with an attempt at a smile.—"That will be as it happens, my love; if there are ladies there, of course you will go; if not,"—"I shall stay at home, and take care of the children," said Jane, good-humouredly. He did not say, "Yes," or "no," but went on upon his own subject. "That is a most clever article in 'The Times,' Jane; have you read it?"—"No, I have not had time, but I will to-morrow."—"Just sit down and read it now, and tell me what you think of it; it won't take you long." Jane's eyes were heavy with sleep, her limbs were aching; she looked at her watch again. "I don't think I really

can understand it to-night, Philip, I am so very tired." He looked annoyed, but said nothing. Jane understood the look well. It was his common complaint that she took no interest in his parliamentary business. "Perhaps it is not so very long," she said; and with a great effort she roused her energies and sat down to study the long political article. Colonel Forbes read till she had ended; and when she laid down the paper, exclaimed, "Well, what do you think of it?" Jane gave her opinion—it seemed to her very conclusive. He looked extremely pleased, and said, that of course it was; it was based upon sound principles, principles he had always advocated, and he would explain to her what they were. He was eloquent upon the subject, and Jane managed to keep awake so well and to ask such very apt questions that he was put into thorough good humour, both with himself and her. He talked till he was tired, till it was half-past eleven, instead of half-past ten, quite unconscious all the time of the fatigue expressed in Jane's face; and then rang for a bottle of soda-water. "I think I must go now," said Jane.—"Oh! why? It is not at all late."—"Half-past eleven," said Jane, "and you know I ought to be in bed by eleven."—"Oh! that is only Dr. Lowe's folly; I don't believe one hour or another makes the slightest difference."—"Not to you, perhaps," said Jane, "but it does to me." She took up her candle, but sat down again. "I think, Philip, if you would get me a glass of water I should be better." Her face expressed so much suffering that he was frightened, and rang the bell violently. "Is it pain my love?—is it the old pain?" he inquired, anxiously. "Not pain exactly, only an odd faint kind of feeling," said Jane; "but I am better now, I dare say I shall do without the water." She stood up, and he made her take his arm. "We must send you to bed quickly," he said, as he led her along the passage, and delivered her into the care of her maid. "Dawson, don't let your mistress exert herself." Jane smiled, and said she was feeling pretty well now: and he left her, quite satisfied.

Breakfast was earlier than usual the next morning; it always was when the Colonel was going to London. He had to drive into Rilworth to meet the ten o'clock train. Jane came down stairs at eight o'clock, not looking well; but Colonel Forbes did not see that. She made his breakfast, and then went to his study to receive his orders. They were always given to her, for he would not trust any one else, though many were of that kind which would have been better given to his steward or bailiff. John Ashton and the farm were again mentioned, and a still

greater determination was expressed by Colonel Forbes not to agree to any offer which would keep him at Moorlands, except that of taking a lease for five years more, and paying increased rent. Jane was bolder this morning, and said she should be grieved to have any thing done hastily, if it were only for Katharine's sake; but she was silenced by her husband's manner. There was a peculiar moodiness, a clouded brow, which always warned her when she was going too far. He could not endure opposition. He said now, that he never acted hastily; that he had considered the subject well, and had consulted persons whose opinion was worth having; his mind was made up. As regarded Miss Ashton, he regretted that Jane should suffer herself to be warped in judgment by a fancied sentimental affection for a person in every way her inferior. Jane could bear much for herself, but contempt expressed for Katharine tried her severely. If she did not reply it was not because she did not feel, but because she felt too much; but Colonel Forbes never saw any thing he did not like to see, and he turned now to a different subject — election parties. He must have some, he said, as soon as he returned, and he begged that Jane would send out cards of invitation. — “Certainly, if you wish it,” was Jane's reply; “but is it necessary for me to appear at these parties? They try me very much, and they seem only intended for gentlemen.” — “I cannot urge the point, my love, but you know what will be the result of showing disrespect to the Rilworth people.” Jane was silent again. — “I shall probably bring down one or two parliamentary men with me,” continued the Colonel. “You will be prepared for them, Jane.” — “Certainly, dear Philip; I am always ready, as you know, for your friends; only spare me the wives and daughters,” she added, laughing. — “I will spare you what I can, my dear,” he answered, in a tone of impatience; “but you must remember that we have something else to consult besides inclination.” What was to be said to that argument? Nothing. Jane summoned up her courage to endure the importation of a set of fine London ladies whom she scarcely knew, and did not at all like, and who would certainly upset for the time her little plans of occupation and charity. — “I suppose,” she said, timidly, when the last orders were given, “you will not have any leisure in London.” — “I can't say, my love; probably not; but what do you want?” — “Only that poor boy, young Dawes, who was sent to the hospital; — I should like to know that some one had seen him; or if you could only inquire how he is going on.” — “Better wait till you go to London yourself,

my dear," replied the Colonel. "Ladies always manage these things better than gentlemen. Is there any thing else?" — "Nothing except. — but never mind, I had better not trouble you. You will not be able, I suppose, to come into the garden and give your opinion about the turn of the new walk. I should like to have it all finished before your return." — "Finish it your own way, my dear, I don't care about it. Where are the children?" — "In the nursery, just going out." He hurried upstairs much quicker than she could follow, kissed his little girl once, his boy many times, and was standing in the hall again before the carriage was ready. Jane followed him there: "How often shall I hear from you, dear Philip?" — "I can't exactly say, my love; you know I am only going for a week, and I shall be tremendously busy." — "Yes, I forgot that," said Jane. "I suppose you could not write and tell me for certain if I have to go to the Castle." — "If I remember it I will; but you need not fret yourself about it, you have nothing to do but to make up your mind that you will go. — What are those fellows doing with the carriage?" — "I hear the wheels," said Jane, going to the hall-door. — "Then, good-bye, my love." He kissed her hastily. Jane's eyes were full of tears; but her manner had something of the old impassiveness. Besides, the servants were near; she could not let them see that she was wanting in self-control. — "Remember you write every day, my love," said the Colonel, "and tell me every thing you hear of public matters." — "Certainly." Jane's lips quivered, and she could not say more. The time was gone by when every tone and look was noticed. Colonel Forbes said another cheerful good-bye, waved his hand from the window, and drove off. Jane watched the carriage down the avenue, and when it entered the Rilworth road, turned back to her solitary room to think over and treasure up the one request which savoured of the affection of by-gone days: "Remember you write every day, my love." She did not add the reason of the anxiety, "tell me every thing you hear of public matters."

CHAPTER XXX.

JANE spent a great part of the morning in the shrubbery, partly to superintend the turning of the walk, partly for the pleasure of being with her children; but she felt sadly lonely, and there was to be a week of loneliness, possibly more, and after that the intru-

sion of visitors, and then the visit to the Castle. She sighed for quietness, not by herself, but with her husband—quietness which would bring him back to her and give him sympathy with her pursuits. The whirl in which he lived separated him from her sadly in appearance—she could not, would not, think it was in heart. Even now she did not see his faults, or if she did see them she attributed them only to circumstances. Yet from whatever cause they arose they had the same unfortunate effect upon her,—they chilled her, and doubled her natural fence of reserve. How could she speak to him upon subjects near her heart when she was met by answers which showed that his thoughts were wandering, or that he was irritated by the interruption to his own ideas? But Jane blamed herself almost wholly. When he was cold and absent, she said it was her own unfortunate manner which was the cause; and if he complained of her, as he sometimes did, she at once acknowledged the justice of the accusation. She was, she knew, very chilly at times. But how could she expand to the sun when there was no sun to cheer her? Often and often, when feeling was most aroused, when one word of love would have assisted her over the barrier of her natural disposition, and enabled her to pour forth the full tide of her affection, some act of thoughtlessness, some expression which showed ignorance of her wishes, checked the torrent ready to escape, and forced it back with the rush of disappointed feeling to the depths of her own heart. The world looked at Mrs. Forbes, and called her happy; perhaps she was so according to their notions of happiness. She had no great griefs, no wearing anxieties; her husband could not be called unkind or tyrannical; he was very properly attentive to her, very respectably affectionate; he gave her every thing that wealth could procure, and was anxious about her when she was ill, and insisted upon having the very best medical advice. If he did not share her pursuits, at least he did not generally interfere with them; and as long as she did not come in the way of his political interests, he did not wish to put a check upon her parochial ones. Her children were lovely, healthy, and intelligent; her little girl becoming something of a companion, her boy showing, even in his infancy, signs of a precocious intellect. One grief—the loss of her mother, who had died about two years after her marriage—had indeed darkened her happiness for a time; but (so the world said) a married woman would naturally feel the severing of that early tie much less than one to whom it was the entire break up of home. People were very sorry for her when her mother died, but no one considered that it

would be a life-long grief. How could it be, when she had a kind husband and two sweet little children left ?

Mrs. Forbes was envied by many, by all perhaps in Rilworth, except one.

"Half-past eleven, nurse, — time for the children to go in, is it not ?" said Jane, sitting down on a bench, and beckoning little Lucy to her. "Lucy is sleepy, I am sure," she added ; and she took up the child in her lap, and laid her hand upon her shoulder. "Lucy stay with mamma," was the child's answer ; and Philip, who could only just run alone, put up his little face for a kiss, and cried for her to take him. Jane always felt so free, so happy with her children ! There could be no reserve, no chilling absence and inattention with them, and nothing she could say or do would be misconstrued. Tired though she was, she took them both in her lap, and played with them, and fondled them with all the yearning tenderness of a young mother's love. "You will wear yourself out with them, ma'am," said the nurse, looking at the tired expression of her face, "and it is their sleeping time ; they had much better go in." — "Yes, I know they had," replied Jane, yet she kept them only the more closely in her arms, and smoothed the little girl's glossy curls, and pressed her lips to her boy's soft cheek. "Lucy stay with mamma, because mamma is alone ;" and the child turned away from the nurse when she would fain have lifted her to the ground. "Then Lucy must stay a whole week," said Jane, "for mamma will be alone all that time." — "Is master gone for so long, ma'am ?" asked the nurse respectfully. — "A week or ten days," said Jane, trying to speak as if she did not care. — "It seems very soon to be away again," was the nurse's comment. "I hoped he was going to stay with us a little, as he only came back so lately. Are you sure you hadn't better go in, ma'am, and rest a little before luncheon ?" But Jane refused. "The fresh air," she said, "was the best thing she could have, and she would sit on the bench, and read, and then at the same time she could watch the men at their work." The children were carried away, not without a little resistance from Lucy ; and Jane sat still to enjoy rest and silence. It was unfortunate that she should extract gall from the simplest words ; yet the observation, "It seems very soon to be away again," in spite of herself, fretted her. True there were parliamentary duties and engagements ; — no doubt there were reasons why her husband should be so constantly absent from her ; yet there must be something more than common in these frequent absences, or they would not be noticed, and noticed by the servants. Jane

could not bear the thought of that ; most especially she dreaded pity from any but those whom she dearly loved. She felt angry with the nurse, and then angry with herself for being so ; and she reasoned, and argued, and thought upon her husband's pressing business, which must necessarily interfere with his attentions to her ; and brought forth from the treasure-house of her memory every little act of affectionate thoughtfulness, every word of anxious interest, and repeated again his last wish, — "Remember you write every day, my love ;" till she believed, or thought at least that she believed, him unchanged. If there was a hollow at her heart, a space unfilled, a feeling unsatisfied, Jane would not then acknowledge it.

It was past twelve, and still she was sitting in the garden, working, when one of the men-servants came to find her, and tell her that Miss Ashton was waiting to speak with her. He seemed to expect the answer : "Ask her to come to me in the garden ;" and Katharine must have expected it also, for she was already standing on the flight of steps which led from the house to the shrubbery. She was a welcome and frequent visitor ; the servant's manner showed that, for he did not think it necessary to point out the bench where she would find his mistress, but left her to make her way by herself through the walks, which perhaps she knew even better than himself. Jane's radiant smile was very dear to Katharine's heart ; it was unmistakable, such entire confidence there was in it ! And though she had come burdened with care, there was still space left for the quick throb of pleasure caused by the return of a most true and long-enduring affection.

Five years of trial and mutual experience and sympathy ! How closely they may knit human hearts together, let the world strive to raise what barriers it may of outward position ! "I have been thinking of you, Katharine," said Jane, "fancying you might be here this morning, because I saw your father's chaise go up the lane last evening, and so I concluded you were all at Moorlands." — "We came yesterday," said Katharine ; "my mother and I walked in the middle of the day, and my father drove over in the evening." — "And does your father like his new pony ?" inquired Jane. "He was just going to buy it when I saw you last." — "Yes, he likes it very much," answered Katharine ; "but I am afraid it won't be a pleasure to him much longer." "Why not ?" asked Jane, though she felt conscience stricken for knowing the answer beforehand. "Can't you guess, dear Mrs. Forbes ?" said Katharine, looking at her with a little surprise. Jane rather hesitated. "Perhaps I may guess something about it, Katharine ;

but one must—" she was going to say, "hope that a mutual agreement may be possible;" but she could not venture upon this, for she was certain that on her husband's side at least there would be no change. "I don't think there is any thing to hope for," continued Katharine; "Colonel Forbes has a fair right to an increase of rent; both my father and John acknowledge that; the misfortune is, that John cannot afford to pay it."—"I should be very, very sorry to lose you as a kind of neighbour," said Jane; "I should not see half as much of you then, Katharine."—"And I am sure we shall be very sorry to go," said Katharine; "we have had many happy days at Moorlands, my father especially. He will never like any other place as well, and indeed I doubt if he will have the opportunity. There is some notion of John's coming back to the shop."—"But that would never do, would it?" exclaimed Jane. "When he has not been brought up to the business; he would never work in it well."—"I don't think he would," replied Katharine; "and that is the reason why I never urge the point myself, though it seems the most natural thing to do. But then if he does not enter the shop, I don't know what he is to do; it is very perplexing." She looked thoroughly harassed, and Jane pressed her hand, and said, "Poor Katharine! I am so sorry for you," just as she would have done in the old days. Katharine struggled against the weak feelings which rose up in her throat, and gave her a sensation of being suffocated, and then she said, "I am much more sorry for my father than for any one else. I hoped the latter years of his life would have been peaceful, but troubles seem to be thickening upon us."—"They do that with us all, I am afraid," said Jane; "but, dear Katharine, we must try and see some way out of this business.—I wish Colonel Forbes was here."—"Is he not?" exclaimed Katharine, with a tone of excessive disappointment; "I thought I saw him yesterday."—"He was here yesterday, but he is gone to London to-day," replied Jane; "and he will be away probably a week or ten days; and when he comes down there will be friends with him, and after that I think we shall be going to stay at the Duke of Lowther's."—"That will not be much quietness for you, dear Mrs. Forbes, and you want quietness," said Katharine, putting aside the thought of her own troubles, as she noticed Jane's worn expression of face.—"I shall have a week's quietness at any rate," said Jane; but the words had in them an accent of bitterness; "and I must make the best use I can of it," she added, "by growing strong. But, Katharine, what is to be done for you in this business?"

Katharine considered a minute. "I should have liked best to talk to Colonel Forbes," she said; "I think I might have made him see things my way then. It is better to ask favours oneself, and what I have to ask is a favour."—"For yourself or your brother?" inquired Jane.—"For my father, principally," replied Katharine; "but does that make any difference?"—"Only that those horrible politics come into the question," said Jane; "Mr. Ashton and Colonel Forbes are not quite one as they used to be." Katharine's start showed a sudden enlightenment. She drew herself up with a momentary feeling of pride, and said, "If that is the cause why Colonel Forbes wishes my brother to go from Moorlands, there is nothing more to be said."—"Just as hasty as in the days of Miss Richardson," exclaimed Jane, with a smile. "Gentlemen are gentlemen, and will have fancies about politics, which you and I perhaps may think carried to a wrong extent; but it does not follow, dear Katharine, that private friends are to quarrel in consequence."—"Quarrel! Oh, no, dear Mrs. Forbes. I was so wrong; please forgive me;" and Katharine looked, and was, ashamed of her burst of petulance. "My father suggested something of the kind," she continued; "and that was the reason why he would not come and talk over the matter himself; but it lies so near his heart that I could not bear to give it all up without an effort, and so I said I would be bold and come instead."—"And what is the favour which Mr. Ashton is too proud to ask?" inquired Jane.—"Why, that instead of making John take a lease of the farm for five years more at once," replied Katharine, "which I believe is what Colonel Forbes wishes, he may be allowed to try it for one year longer with only a moderate increase of rent, and by that time my father thinks John will be cleared of some of the difficulties, which press him now, and will be able to see his way clearly, and judge how far it will be wise to continue at Moorlands. I was very averse to this plan at first," continued Katharine; "I am afraid that it is too much of a place for him. But my father urges it so much, that I suppose he is right; and in fact, as he says, if John were to give up the farm at once, he would be thrown upon the wide world without a home or occupation, and it might be months and months before he would find any thing to suit him; whereas, the delay of a year will give him time to look about."—"I wish I could settle the matter directly for you," replied Jane; "but I am afraid there must be some delay, unless,——" and she paused.—"It frets my father very much," continued Katharine; "I have scarcely ever seen him in such a state of worry as he was last night; and now,

this morning, instead of going into Rilworth, he is staying with John, talking over affairs, and going over the farm.”—“It is a pity he has not some wise farming friend to advise him,” said Jane; “he cannot have had much experience himself.”—“Mr. Ronaldson talked of coming down,” said Katharine.—“Oh! Mr. Ronaldson,” exclaimed Jane, laughing; “your old friend Charlie, Katharine. I remember how the word used to slip out, and how you always corrected yourself and said Mr. Ronaldson immediately afterwards quite properly.”—“I must never call him Charlie again to any one,” said Katharine; “he is a grand man, and going to be married?”—“And to give up the Duke’s northern agency, and take the Rilworth one, is he not?” inquired Jane.—“Not that I ever heard of,” replied Katharine; “he is coming down; but, as I said before, to see my father and John; and I have a notion too that he may be wishing to bring his wife with him, and introduce her to his old friends.”—“Oh! is that all? but I did hear something about the Rilworth agency, I am sure. Never mind about that though, now; tell me what will be done if Mr. Ronaldson does not come?”—“My father and John will have to decide matters for themselves,” said Katharine; “and I don’t think,—I hope it is not very undutiful,—but I don’t think they are very likely to decide wisely.”—“And delay is all you want?” said Jane.—“Yes, delay, with a moderate increase of rent; only I thought,—dear Mrs. Forbes, would it be troubling you very much to ask you to write?” Jane looked extremely uncomfortable, and Katharine’s quick eye instantly caught the change in her countenance. “But not if you have any objection; if you at all think it would be better not,” she added; “you must know much better than I can.”—“It might be better for you to write yourself, Katharine,” observed Jane; and a flush of painful feelings crimsoned her face. Katharine made no answer for some moments, and then she said, “If it is because of politics that Colonel Forbes wishes John to go, it will be better to let things stay as they are; I could not write myself.”—“Why not?” inquired Jane.—“Because it is not my place, and he would think so, and be angry; writing is such a very business thing—it is quite different from talking. I think I could have explained myself if I had been able to see him.”—“And you may see him very soon,” replied Jane; “I will let you know directly he comes home.” Katharine thanked her, but her manner was that of a person who was very disappointed. Jane could not bear this, she felt as if she had been cowardly. “I am afraid I have vexed you by not agreeing to write myself,” she said.—“I dare say I am wrong in being vexed,” replied Katharine,

candidly; "I am sure you must have very good reasons."—"I would do it in an instant," said Jane, "if I thought it would further your cause." Her colour went and came fast, and Katharine saw directly that she must not press the subject. Jane felt as if she had betrayed herself by giving cause for suspicion that her influence with her husband was not what it once had been. She could not bear that, even with Katharine; and she tried to explain, to lay the blame upon politics, but it would not do. She was so thoroughly true in feeling and in word, that the shadow of dissimulation perplexed her painfully. Katharine's perceptions were too keen not to read something of the truth. "Dear Mrs. Forbes," she said, as Jane held her hand affectionately; "please do not try to explain. I was in fault, not you; it would really vex me now if you were to write. My father must wait, it will only be the delay of a week."—"No, only a week," said Jane abstractedly.—"And I will go home and preach patience to him," continued Katharine. Jane assented, but in the same absent way, and Katharine rose to take leave. "I had a great deal to say to you," observed Jane; "but it is gone now; my head aches terribly." She put her hand to her head, and the same look of suffering which had frightened her husband the evening before came over her face. Katharine did not like to leave her, and begged her to go into the house; but Jane shook her head. "Just tell them to send my maid to me, that is all I want—good-bye, dear Katharine; it is going off again, I shall be quite well in a minute," she added, as Katharine watched her anxiously; "I sat up too late last night, that is all."—"You want some one to take care of you," said Katharine. She spoke without any particular meaning, merely from kindness; but the words shot like a dagger through Jane's heart, and tired and ill as she already was, she leant her head upon Katharine's shoulder and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KATHARINE went back to Moorlands, thinking very little of her own affairs—very much of Jane's. Some incidents, trifling in themselves, solve mysteries which have perplexed us for years. Five years had Katharine been pondering the question which she had asked herself when first she met Jane as the mistress of Maplestead—Was she going to be happy? For five years had

she watched the course of Jane's life, noticed her looks and words, and varied in her opinion almost with every fresh opportunity for observation. In her first married days Jane appeared blind to that which to Katharine was clear as the sunlight. She was so unselfish and self-sacrificing that she seemed not to have the power of perceiving selfishness in others—especially in those she loved. It was so easy to her to give up her own wishes, that she was not conscious when she had done so. During this period Katharine imagined that Jane was happy; or if occasionally clouds appeared to be gathering, they formed only a thin mist, which scarcely could be said to obscure the brightness of her life. But then came a change. Colonel Forbes entered upon political life, and every thing was considered subordinate to his parliamentary interests. His wife's domestic quiet was disturbed, and her most cherished pursuits were put aside, if in the slightest degree they crossed the path of his ambition; and Katharine could not but perceive that Jane was oftentimes in consequence sorely fretted. As an instance, she had kept up the care of her district, not very regularly, but still with a thoughtful judgment and kindness which had been a great help to Katharine, and many were the little favours which the poor had obtained from her influence with her husband. But this was now stopped. When Katharine mentioned cases in which Colonel Forbes could be of use, Jane hesitated to mention them. He was busy; or she was afraid he would not like to do what he was asked, because of offending Mr. So-and-so; or she knew he would not take any steps in the matter until he had consulted some one else. There was always some obstacle in the way very distressing to Jane—Katharine could see that—but quite insurmountable; and at last Jane gave up her district; partly, she said, because of health, partly because of want of leisure; but a very great deal, as Katharine suspected, because she felt that kindnesses were expected from her which she had not the power to show.

Still these vexations might not disturb the real happiness of life, and every thing was outwardly smooth with Jane and her husband. Katharine had not much opportunity of seeing further. The instinct of her own good taste made her feel that she must not go to Maplestead even as often as Jane would have been willing to see her there. Jane had a regard for her from the associations of old times, but Colonel Forbes could not care in the least about her; and Katharine very soon perceived that, although he expected his own friends to be welcomed at once by Jane as hers, he did not at all think it necessary to reciprocate the sympathy.

He was very civil to Katharine when they met; but that seldom happened. When Katharine knew that Jane was alone, she went to Maplestead to see her; when she knew that Colonel Forbes was there, she never intruded except when business required it.

But even in those few meetings, a quick eye like Katharine's could, after a time, discover some causes for doubting Jane's perfect happiness. It was quite evident that she humoured her husband, not from affection only, but from fear. Whenever he began a subject, she pursued it, even at the risk of tiring others; whenever she had a subject to begin herself, she touched upon it with delicate caution. If he showed an interest in it, it was followed out; but if he was abstracted or indifferent, it was instantly dropped. If she differed from him it was always with the utmost humility; her suggestions were those of a gentle child doubtful of her own power. Now and then he would listen to them; but more frequently he just smiled and turned to another subject. He was kept in good humour by these means, and so Jane was satisfied; but it was a life of constant effort — there was no freedom in it. Jane could not read or write, or work, or talk — she could not even say that she liked or disliked a thing, without consulting that handsome, polished, clever brow, which was open or clouded with every change of the working mind within.

And the provoking point to Katharine in all this was that there was so little directly to complain of. If Colonel Forbes had been passionate, or absurdly particular upon any special subject, or exacting in any one peculiar fancy, there would have been a direct cause of offence, and it might have been reasoned against, or borne patiently; but it was an indescribable, intangible source of trial, and one to which his own eyes were necessarily blinded. He had always loved himself best; he did so now. It was not possible for him to perceive that he was changed in any way, because, though his outward manner might be different, his heart was unaltered. His indifference to Jane's wishes and feelings now was only another form of the same selfishness which, before they were married, had induced him to consult them. He loved her first because she pleased his taste, and approved herself to his judgment of what the wife of a man in his position ought to be. To indulge the feeling, to obtain her thankful affection in return, he lavished upon her all his wealth, and devoted to her all his time. But his constant thought for the future was not how he could please her when she was his wife, but how she could please him — what a pleasant, intelligent companion she would be — how gracefully she would do the honours of his house.

—how proud he should be of introducing her to his friends! He wished to see her happy, but then she must learn to be so in his way. There was no change in all this after they married, only the first excitement of feeling had passed off. He was accustomed to her. His selfishness took the form of love before; now it was changed into ambition. He did not really mean to be as unkind as he often was — he would have been shocked to know the effect which his impatience and neglect had upon his gentle wife, and he would have deemed it disgraceful to behave in an unmanly way towards one so trusting and loving; but he was a cold man — cold, though with impetuous feelings, sudden impulses, even overflowings of kindness and apparent benevolence; he was cold because self was his centre, and the touch of self changes the rushing stream of love into an iceberg. To Katharine Ashton, Jane's life was a mystery. Inexperienced in love herself, she could not imagine the extent of its blinding power. Before Jane's marriage she had given Colonel Forbes credit for virtues which he did not possess, upon the strength of Jane's affection for him; now that she was convinced her own first impressions were true, it seemed as if, necessarily, Jane's eyes must also be opened, and that her love in consequence must diminish. But this did not appear to be the case. Jane still mourned over her husband's absence, watched eagerly for his return, planned for his happiness, sacrificed every favourite wish of her own, if she had the most distant suspicion that by so doing she could give him pleasure. Katharine marvelled at her, and the more because she became convinced at last that Jane was not blind as she imagined. She felt her husband's faults if she did not see them — they made her unhappy; — but she loved him still devotedly. Katharine thought she could not have done the same; but then she was not married.

But Katharine had not yet reached the inmost secret of Jane's disappointment. All outward things could be borne, and even the gradual subsiding of her husband's first excessive fondness might have seemed only the natural change from over-excited feelings to calmer, yet not less enduring affection. She was no sentimentalist, fed upon romances, and believing that the honeymoon of life was to last for ever — she was quite prepared for little trials of temper and peculiarities of taste; but she had never supposed it possible that from any cause her respect for him might be lessened. It was long, very long, before the idea had been more than a passing misgiving; it was so intensely painful, that Jane shrank from it, as from a thought of sin. But it came by:

slow degrees; first as a momentary pang, then a settled doubt, not understood but felt; then a wearing, aching pain, into the origin of which she never inquired, but which was aggravated day by day, as passing events showed the motives which influenced his conduct.

Walking side by side through life, professing the same belief, repeating the same prayers, kneeling in the same church, sometimes before the same altar, they were far as the poles asunder. Colonel Forbes lived for this world, Jane for the world to come. Colonel Forbes thought only of the praise of man, Jane of the praise of God. They could agree and act together on all great points;—there is no lasting credit in these days to be obtained except by a certain amount of religion, — and thus Jane had been deceived. But in daily life, when it became a question of strictness with the servants, attention to religious duties at inconvenient hours, exertion to attend church services, braving the annoyance of some person of influence for the sake of an act of charity to the poor, there was always a falling off—very plausibly excused, perhaps even upheld by specious arguments, but still — Jane was far too earnest and single-minded not to see it — a decided, unmistakable turning aside from the right path. That was the pang, that was the exceeding grief, which none but God might see.

Katharine could wonder, and pity, and love, and long to comfort, as she did this day, when the disappointment of Mrs. Forbes' life was first fully made clear to her; but she could never know the hours of bitter anguish which Jane spent in her own chamber, kneeling in silent speechless anguish, and dreading even in prayer to own the sorrow of her heart, since it accused her husband of sin.

It might not have been so with others. There are thousands in the world who marry, and are disappointed—disappointed even in esteem, and yet live patiently and comfortably, and probably would, on the whole, prefer even such a married life to the loneliness of a single one; but Jane's mind was like her outward form, not constituted to bear the roughnesses of life. "Trifles light as air," which by many would have been put aside without a thought, were felt by her with a quickness which was actual pain. When once she had the clue to the source of her husband's inconsistency, she could read the worldly motive even in his best actions, and so they ceased to give her pleasure; and then she became grave and silent, almost sad; and he was vexed and angry, and she, in her turn, frightened, and shut herself up still more in her own thoughts.

And so the unacknowledged, unrealised estrangement between them increased every day.

If Jane would scarcely allow all this to herself, still less would she speak of it to any one else. A great deal of the depression which she felt was attributed by her to bad health; and she was very much out of health. She was not naturally strong, and the life which she was leading tried her very much. Constant dinner parties, late hours, and perpetual calls for the entertainment of persons staying in the house, were as much as she could have borne if she had been perfectly well and happy, and had attended to nothing else. But Jane could not live a life of idle luxury. Though she had given up her district in Rilworth, she felt herself bound to attend to the poor around Maplestead; and she had a school close to the lodge, and a clothing club, and was watchful over her children, and thoughtful for the comfort and instruction of her servants; and this in addition to copying her husband's letters, listening to his political pamphlets, and reading, if possible, every thing, however, dry and abstruse, which she thought might be a good subject of conversation with him.

It was no wonder that she was ill. The strange thing was that Colonel Forbes did not see it. But he had always considered her a delicate person, and yet equal to considerable exertion when excited; and he did not see much change in her now, except that she was thinner. How should he? He had a prospect, not perhaps very near, but still sufficient to give him a constant stimulus, of being one day a member of the government. He thought of very little else, and Jane unconsciously encouraged him, for she was quite willing to talk of nothing else.

It seems hard to blame a man for not seeing what another carefully tries to hide from him. Katharine often thought she was severe in her judgment of Colonel Forbes; and when he was kind to his wife, and civil to herself, she always tried to like him, and make excuses for him; but there was nothing but her own right feeling to soften her towards him. Political feeling ran very high in Rilworth about this time. Her father and Colonel Forbes held opposite views upon one or two of the leading questions of the day. Of course, therefore, she was not likely to hear any thing in his favour from any of her own family; and now that this question of Moorlands and the rent had arisen, there seemed likely to be a complete feud. What Katharine would have desired, setting aside her personal likings and dislikings, would have been to break the connection at once, and for John to remove to another place; but there was a good deal of reason in what

her father said upon the subject. Rents had risen everywhere, and John might not find a farm cheaper than Moorlands, even if he left it; and if he could once be set free from the burdens he had incurred, or rather which his father had incurred for him when first undertaking the farm, he might, with care, find his income sufficient. The next year Mr. Ashton hoped would be a very successful one with himself. If it were so he could help John; and it seemed a pity, therefore, not to wait and see in what state affairs were likely to be before taking a step which could not be recalled. All this had brought Katharine's judgment round to the Moorlands side of the question; and she had hoped to go at once to Colonel Forbes and settle it. He was a prejudiced man, but never unfair; and in spite of political enmity, Katharine thought that the remembrance of old times, and the long acquaintance with her father, would induce him to view the case favourably. It was a great disappointment to her to be obliged to go back to Moorlands and say that she had not seen Colonel Forbes, and that nothing could be decided for another week. Many important arrangements depended upon what John was going to do; and Mr. Ashton had worked himself up to such anxiety, that Katharine quite dreaded the consequence of the trial of patience he was to endure. She found him standing in the porch with John, looking out for her. The children were there too, but, contrary to Mr. Ashton's usual custom, he was not playing with them, or indeed noticing them at all; and in fact they were in the way, and John had just called to the nurse to take them to the nursery.—“Well Kitty, child!” was Mr. Ashton's greeting. He was too proud to ask in plain words for the answer.—“Patience, father,” replied Katharine, lightly; “Colonel Forbes has gone to London for a week.”—John uttered a very impatient exclamation. Mr. Ashton checked his irritation, and only said, “Umph!” but he folded his arms, and walked away by himself. John was just then summoned to the farm. Katharine followed her father. She put her arm within his, and they went into the garden, to the broad walk which separated the kitchen-garden from the lawn. “Only a week's patience, father dear,” said Katharine, gently; “we must be contented to wait for that.”—“Yes, Kitty, yes.” He seemed very thoughtful.—“Is it of so much consequence?” continued Katharine.—“Only another week's anxiety, Kate, and there has been enough of that lately.”—“And I am afraid there will be enough of that to come,” observed Katharine; “whether John goes or stays, it will be very uphill work with him.”—“And

with us all," continued Mr. Ashton; "Moorlands has cost me a pretty good penny, taking one thing and another."—"I don't think we any of us care much about being rich," said Katharine; "at least my mother and I don't, I am sure."—"No; and there would always be the business," observed Mr. Ashton. "Mr. Madden was with me yesterday afternoon, when you were gone, talking about Henry. He wants to see him a partner very much."—"And you are inclined to have him, aren't you?" replied Katharine. "He would bring in some ready money, and help you a good deal; and really, father, you want help."—"Yes, replied Mr. Ashton, gravely, "and I can't have it where I ought to have it. If I were to go over life again I would not do as I have done."—"Not with regard to John," said Katharine; "but father, dear, there is no good in looking back and regretting." He did not seem inclined to take advantage of the consolation, but went on with his own thoughts.—"It was a foolish kind of teaching the boy had when he was a child,—all that petting, and humouring, and bringing him up to think he might choose what he would be. If we had only told him at once that there was the shop and he must look to it, he wouldn't have said what he did to me just now."—"What was that?" asked Katharine, anxiously; dreading above all things a misunderstanding between her father and her brother.—"I can't blame him for it," said Mr. Ashton; "it is but my own doing. But I asked him what he would do if it came to the point of leaving Moorlands, and I told him that he might come into the shop and take the partnership instead of young Madden; and I make him a very fair offer about the house. I said he and Selly could have the upstairs parlour to themselves, and that I would give them the spare bed-room, and fit up the attic for the children; but it wouldn't do, it wouldn't do, Kitty—he can't take to business; and he said he would rather go off to Australia and try his fortune there."—"Australia!" exclaimed Katharine, in a tone of horror.—"Ay, child Australia," said Mr. Ashton, with a quietness which was more painful to Katharine than any outbreak; "and that would break your mother's heart, and mine too."

Katharine was silent for a few moments. Presently she said, "It is all very well to talk of, but he would never do it."—"He would, if it came to a question between that and the shop," said Mr. Ashton. "Kitty, for your mother's sake we must keep him at Moorlands."—"Well, we will hope we may, dear father," replied Katharine with a tone of cheerfulness which she was very far from feeling.—"If he stays here, he will come right in the

end," continued Mr. Ashton; "if he tries new-fangled plans he will be ruined."—Katharine thought in her own mind, that the chances of ruin were about equal in both cases; but she would not fret her father by saying so, and only replied, "Well, we must wait and see."—"And in the meantime I must give Mr. Madden an answer about the partnership," said Mr. Ashton. "I did not think he would have hurried matters on so fast; but he says he has an offer of help if the affair can be arranged, and if not he must be looking out for something else for Henry. I should be sorry to lose him; he has a good head for business, and he is honest and straightforward."—"Yes," replied Katharine; "I wish he was not so much of a politician, he makes himself enemies by it; but, however, one can't have every thing."—"And if one has not one side one must have the other," continued Mr. Ashton. "I never knew a place so cut up as Rilworth is by politics. Why George Andrews and Madden don't speak now."—"Their quarrel dates further back than any thing political," said Katharine. "They quarrelled years ago at the Union Ball, and even before it."—"The Dis-union Ball you mean, Kitty," observed Mr. Ashton, smiling at his own wit.—"The Dis-union certainly," replied Katharine, "if one may judge from the two parties which date their split from it."—"Very foolish it all is," observed Mr. Ashton, thoughtfully; "things seem so trifling when one looks back upon them."—"Trifling except in their consequences," replied Katharine.—Mr. Ashton walked twice up and down the walk without making another observation; then he said suddenly, "It would have been a better thing for me, Kitty, if you and Mr. Reeves had taken to be friends earlier."—"We must be thankful that we are friends at all," replied Katharine; "I am sure I never could have expected it."—"I shouldn't like him ever to think I was forgetful of what he has advised," continued Mr. Ashton. "I hope, Kitty, when I am not here to look after things, you will see that the subscriptions are kept up as far as can be." Katharine did not quite understand what he meant by not being here to look after things, but she said she should always be delighted to do any thing he wished. "And there will be enough for you to do it with," continued Mr. Ashton. "There's the shop, and outstanding debts, and fifteen hundred pounds in the funds; there ought to have been a pretty good deal more, only——" "Never mind, dear father," replied Katharine, speaking cheerfully, yet with an effort, for she understood now what was in his thoughts; "when the time comes that it shall please God to part us, my mother and I shall not think much about being rich or poor, you

may be quite sure of that.”—“You have been a good daughter to me, Kitty,” said Mr. Ashton. “God will reward you for it.”—“He has rewarded me,” said Katharine, stopping to kiss him. “It is a thousand times more reward than I could ever deserve to hear you say so.” Mr. Ashton put his hands upon her cheeks, according to an old habit, and looked at her fixedly. His eyes were glistening; and when he returned her kiss, first on one side, then on the other, Katharine felt a tear upon her face.

“There is the chaise,” she said, looking down the lane to avoid noticing her father. He seemed relieved at the interruption, and said he would go into the house and say good-bye to his wife, and Selly, and the children. Katharine thought the children were asleep, and begged him, as he was coming out again in the evening, not to disturb them; but he could not be persuaded, and stole upstairs, according to his own notions, so quietly, that it was quite impossible for them to be awakened. Clara and Johnnie were lying in their little cribs, quite worn out with the morning’s play; their cheeks were flushed with bright crimson, and their hair, with its disorderly truant curls, was clustering round their little calm faces. There were no traces of angry passions then—they might have been sleeping angels.—Perhaps Mr. Ashton thought them so, for his eye dwelt on them with a tender lingering regret, and when he had turned away to kiss the baby who was lying in its nurse’s arms, he came back again once more to the crib, and stood looking at them as if he would fain bear their image with him, to give him quietness in the turmoil of his business. “They can’t come to any harm, Kitty, it’s impossible,” he said, in an under tone; “if they have a silly mother, they have a wise aunt.”—“I am afraid aunts can’t do much against mothers,” replied Katharine, smiling.—“Where there’s a will there’s a way,” said Mr. Ashton. “I look to you, Kitty, to be the poor little things’ best friend. There—it won’t do to waste any more time with them.” Once more he bent over them; Johnnie just opened his eyes and said, “Grandpapa,” and put his arms up to him, and then turned aside and was fast asleep again. Clara pouted and moaned, and hid her face in her pillow;—and so he left them. “You will be out again, my dear, at six,” said Mrs. Ashton, as her husband stepped into the chaise; “and bring out some biscuits for the children, and ask at Sawyer’s for a packet of his best arrow-root. Selina can’t take what she has, it is so bad.”—“And father, make Susan tell you if any of the poor people from the district have been up,” said Katharine.—“Oh! yes, and the work, Kitty,” said Mrs. Ashton. “The work, my

“dear,” she repeated, speaking to her husband. “You will find a roll of calico in the first long drawer of the bureau. That will do for you, Kitty, when you have made the children’s frocks.”—“Nothing more,” exclaimed Mr. Ashton, with good-humoured impatience; “I vow if there is, you shall come in and fetch it yourselves. Good-bye, Selly; good-bye, John, my boy; keep a good heart; good-bye, God bless you all.”

They were the last words they heard. At six o’clock that evening Katharine was again walking down the lane, again expecting her father, listening again for the sound of carriage-wheels. The chaise came up the Rilworth road, and she saw it turn the sharp corner into the lane which, though improved, was still rough, and always associated in her mind with the accident which had befallen her on her first visit to Moorlands. A heavy waggon was in the way. Katharine saw there was very little room to pass, yet fancied that her father would be sure to get by; but the new pony became frightened and restive, and reared; and Katharine rushed forward, not knowing what she was going to do; and the wheel of the chaise became entangled with the heavy wheel of the waggon, and one of the great waggon horses became frightened too, and—Katharine never quite knew in detail what happened next; but there was a terrible confusion with the waggoner and his boy, crying for help, and her father calling to her to come and hold the pony. And then, just as she was about to seize its head, the pony gave a desperate plunge, the chaise was upset, her father thrown out violently, with his head against a stone,—and when Katharine knelt beside him—he was dead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GLOOM was in the streets of Rilworth; the principal shops were shut, and many faces were grave,—many sorrowful and compassionate,—whilst the heavy clang of the tolling bell gave warning that one, a companion and friend, was about to be carried to his grave.

Mr. Ashton had been much respected; he had been associated with all the chief events in the little town for the last five-and-twenty years. Persons had learnt to think that his advice was necessary; that without his judgment difficulties could not be satisfactorily arranged; and, of late years, more than respect had

been attached to his name; he had shown himself a kind and unselfish friend, and a liberal benefactor to the poor. He was followed to his last home with blessings; and those who knew most intimately the workings of his secret heart prayed that, when their summons should come, they also, like him, might have made their peace with God.

These were soothing thoughts, even to Katharine, as she sat that day by her mother's bedside, thankful that the torpor of opiates had given a short respite from the restless feverish anguish which had been Mrs. Ashton's trial for the last week.

Katharine was strangely altered in that short time; she could even see it herself. She had grown so old,—the lines of her features were so deeply indented, her eyes were so dim and dark;—but she was quite quiet and self-possessed—she had been so from the beginning. She had known exactly what to do, and to order; she had never troubled her mother with a single question, yet had arranged, even to the minutest particular, according to what she knew would be her wish; whilst it seemed to Mrs. Ashton as if she was never left. Katharine was at hand, by night as well as by day, to whisper soothing words of hope,—to suggest the duty of faith and submission,—to lead the troubled, broken heart to the rest which, stunned by sorrow, it scarcely knew how to seek. How all this was done Katharine could not tell. She had indeed kind friends; Mr. Reeves was with her, often; and Jane made herself so much at home at Moorlands, that she was allowed to enter the house at all hours, and make her way unnoticed to Katharine's room, and remain there as she chose, without its being thought necessary on either side to make an apology for intrusion or neglect. But the real support was nothing earthly; it was a strength beyond her own, beyond any human power, which upheld her. For Katharine was like one in a dream. Comfort was taken mechanically,—even offered by herself mechanically. She did not feel that she had any feeling,—she knew what was to be done, and she did it, without tears or any outward expression of grief. Only at last, when the calm summer breeze brought to her from afar the first sound which told that it was the day of her father's funeral, she burst into tears, and the weight of a heavy cloud seemed to pass away from her mind.

Selina came in to see her; and this was something of comfort, for Selina, though not sensible or useful,—that she never could be,—was softened, and in a degree sympathising; and she could help Katharine a little, by sitting with Mrs. Ashton whilst Katharine refreshed herself in the garden. She was come to offer

this now. Katharine thanked her with a smile, and a whisper of gratitude, and then she took her prayer-book, and went out. The broad walk was the best place for exercise; but she could not go there, it had been her last happy walk; besides, her thoughts were away in the churchyard at Rilworth. She was, in fancy, standing beneath the old yew tree, where her grandfather and her grandmother had been laid, and where her father was now to rest; she was listening to a voice repeating, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord;" and she longed to kneel alone, and rest her weary heart with the same blessed words. And so she went to a small summer-house which was used as the children's play-room, where she could lock the door, and be quite to herself, and sit or kneel unperceived, and see from the narrow window the tower of Rilworth Church, and listen for the last toll which would give notice that the service was begun.

It was all gone through. Katharine had prayed, that when she herself should depart this life, she might rest in Christ, and be found acceptable in His sight on the morning of the Resurrection; and still she knelt, in tranquil thought of that bright reunion which was to restore to her the affection for which her soul was yearning. Tears came very fast now, but they were not bitter. She could read great mercy in the present, terrible though it was. She could trust in it for the future; and, though she could not think of any thing very distinctly, there was a sure loving confidence and submission granted her, which was like the peace of sleep to her worn spirits. After a time she rose up from her prayers; but still she lingered at the little window, unwilling to lose the sight of the old church tower, which was more a home to her now than any thing else could be. She heard voices about the farm, and knew that one was John's. He was especially dear to her just then, for their grief was in common; and she forgot all his follies when she was trying to comfort him, though it was often painfully forced upon her that she was the person to whom all looked for advice and support; and that he, who ought to have been every thing as the head of the family, was comparatively nothing.

Thinking that he would come into the garden to look for her, she went out to meet him; but the voices she had heard must have been in the farm yard, for no one was in the garden except the nurse with the children. Katharine had not seen the little ones before that morning. They ran up to her directly:—"See, aunt Kate, new frocks!" and they pointed to their black dresses. Katharine turned from them, unable even to kiss them. A chok-

ing, hysterical feeling rose up in her throat, and she walked very quickly up and down the gravel path, trying to overcome it; now and then she stooped and gathered a flower, but she would not let herself think or look about—it was only by a strong physical effort that she could hope to master herself. She had reached the laurel hedge between the lawn and the kitchen-garden, and turned again. Some one—a man—came along the cross path towards her. She fancied it was John, and did not look at him particularly till he came nearer; then there was a second glance, and Katharine saw that it was not John, it was Charles Ronaldson. She was startled, yet scarcely surprised, after the first moment, for she had known he might come at any time. Her impulse was to go into the house, she was feeling so ill and weak; that, however, would have been unkind; and she could not be so to him who for years had been so kind to them. Besides,—it was a very vague memory which came over Katharine at that moment—something that brought back to her a time of sadness, which yet was scarcely sadness, so little there had been of real grief in it,—but it made her feel gently and kindly towards him; and she was grateful, that after so long a separation, he had come to visit them now in their trouble. He had lost all his shy, odd manner, and came up and shook hands very warmly; and she kept back the struggling tears, and spoke calmly, and told him that she was very thankful to see him; she had often been thinking of him lately, and her mother and John would find it the greatest possible comfort to have him with them now. “He had hoped that might be,” he said, “and, therefore, he had made his arrangements to come away as soon —” He stopped. — “It was very like you,” said Katharine gratefully; “you always knew how to put aside your own wishes.” — “They were not put aside at all in this case,” he said; “my wish was to come!” — “To give us comfort,” replied Katharine; “we want it very much! But won’t you go in and see my mother, or at least let me tell her that you are come, and prepare her for seeing you? And John, too, must be told.” — “John knows that I am here,” he replied; “I was at Rilworth with him.” — “Were you!” and Katharine’s glistening eyes sparkled with a little of the expression of former days. “Then you were present.” — “Yes, present at the service; I came on purpose; that is, I only arrived about six this morning. There was no time to come on here then.” They walked on some paces silently, and then Katharine said, “Certainly there are times when we learn to value true friends.” His countenance changed, but she did not see it; and, after a moment’s consideration, he said,

"I am glad you will look upon me as a friend; it has been my wish for years to prove myself such." — "Thank you," said Katharine, offering him her hand; "my father always considered you one." He was relieved to find that she could mention her father, and continued the conversation more easily. Katharine told him a great deal of what had taken place which he did not know before, and his sympathy led her on to the expression of her own feelings, and all that had softened the blow to her — those sacred hopes, which perhaps are never more carefully hidden from the general view than when some great shock would at first sight seem necessarily to call them forth to light. Charles was gentle, and kind, and put her quite at her ease. There was nothing in his manner to recall the past, at least, nothing that she would have noticed; indeed, the remembrance was scarcely present to her after the first moment. The conversation, and the walk, and the fresh air were so quieting to her mind, that she would willingly have remained with him much longer; but her mother would be wanting her, and she knew that she must go. Besides, it would be necessary to prepare Mrs. Ashton for seeing Charles. He was wishing himself to find John; his stay, he said, must be very short, and even on that day it would be necessary to talk of business. "Tomorrow," he added, "I am engaged with the Duke of Lowther's business, and the day after I must return." — "So very, very soon," said Katharine; "and when we have been looking for you so long? But I forgot!" — "Forgot what?" She blushed a little from the dread that she was alluding to a subject he might dislike, and answered, ambiguously, "I forgot how much you must have to occupy your thoughts. It has been a great satisfaction to us to hear of the success you have had." — "Thank you," he replied; but he did not pursue the subject, and only added, "May I ask if you are returning to Rilworth?" — "I think so," replied Katharine; "at least for a time. I have not talked about any thing with John yet, he has not been able to bear it; indeed, we have none of us been able. I have not any notion myself what is to be done, but my mother has said once or twice lately that she should like to be at home." — "We must see where her home can be most comfortable," replied Charles. "You will not mind my saying we, I hope, as if I was one of yourselves?" — "Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Katharine. "I am only too glad that it should be we." — Again he seemed checked, but it was only for a moment, and he went on, "John said a little to me just now about the future. He has a notion — I don't know, of course, whether it would be a practicable one, that Mrs. Ashton would

like to remain at Moorlands."—"Live with John and Selina! Oh, no! impossible!" exclaimed Katharine, her natural impetuosity overcoming the sobering influence of her grief.—"He seems very anxious about it," continued Charles, quietly.—"It would not do," was Katharine's reply. "My mother could not live with Selina."—"Not without you, perhaps," he observed.—"Nor with me," replied Katharine; "I should be more likely to mar than to make, in that case."—"Perhaps other persons may judge better than yourself," replied Charles. "Your brother seems to have no fear; he is, in fact, much bent upon the idea."—"He has never suggested it to me," observed Katharine, with a little impatience of manner; then, vexed with herself, she added, "But I would do whatever is right."—"Yes, I was quite sure, thoroughly convinced, you would. I told your brother that if, upon consideration, it seemed the most feasible step, there could not be a doubt of your acquiescence." Katharine felt again as if she ought to have been consulted before her brother and Charles Ronaldson formed plans for her; and a little pride rose up in her heart, which helped her, for a few minutes, to continue the conversation in a cold, business-like way. But it could not last. Charles Ronaldson was so entirely considerate, and even deferential to her wishes, she could not be proud with him. Conscience reproached her, and made her more bitterly sorrowful than she would have been from any other sorrow; and in order to bring herself round to a right frame of mind, she tried to throw herself more heartily into the plan.

A change must be made; that she saw, when Charles had talked to her a little. At first she had entertained a hope that she and her mother might make arrangements with Henry Madden, or with any one who might take the business, so as to remain in the old house. This would satisfy her mother, Katharine felt; and it was certainly what she most wished for herself; she was so fond of Rilworth and her district, and so thankful to be near Mr. and Mrs. Reeves. But the expense she now saw would be more than they could afford, and the house was too large for them; and, besides, the shop could not well be separated from it; and if it were, the plan would materially lessen the value of the business if it were sold. The plan which had suggested itself to John was, that Henry Madden should take the shop, just as it was, and carry on the business, giving Mrs. Ashton and Katharine a fixed sum for a certain number of years out of it. Charles was a little fearful of the plan, thinking that if the business were to decrease, it would be an injury to them; but John was perfectly certain of

Henry Madden's fitness for the position, and felt it would save a great deal of present inconvenience. Besides, it had been a plan once suggested by his father, when talking over the chances of the future. This consideration weighed with Katharine more than any other. She had a great opinion of her father's wisdom in worldly matters, and any word of his now assumed a sacred importance in her eyes. Nothing, however, could be settled without talking to Mrs. Ashton; nor until Charles had gone over the farm, and decided whether the plan of remaining there all together was feasible.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE evening of that day was misty and rather cold. It was late in the summer, and there was an autumnal feeling in the air. Jane wrapped her shawl closely round her, and walked up and down the avenue at Maplestead waiting for her husband. He was to come alone, but in two days' time a large importation of visitors was to arrive. Jane was thankful to have him to herself if only for two evenings; yet she was a little nervous at the prospect of his arrival, for she had made up her mind to speak to him upon business. When Katharine Ashton talked to her of Moorlands, and asked her to write to Colonel Forbes about the lease and the rent, she had a good excuse to herself for declining; but she was not thoroughly satisfied, she fancied that she had been a coward. The feeling was deepened now, for all Jane's sympathies were excited. Katharine's interests had become hers, doubly, trebly, in that week of sorrow. Whatever she could do for her she felt must be done, at any sacrifice of her own feelings. And what had she to fear? Why did her heart sink at the thought of introducing an unwelcome subject and receiving an ungracious answer? Words were but words; and if her husband were annoyed it would not be on account of any real fault on her part. So Jane reasoned with herself; and so perhaps almost all reason at some time or other. There is no real cause for dreading to say disagreeable things, and yet perhaps there is nothing from which people so often shrink; and thus those who are apt to show annoyance and impatience, become in a way tyrants, not because they mean to be so, but because the persons with whom they live are cowards. Jane went through the conversation in her own

mind many times ; saw exactly how her husband would look, heard exactly how he would speak. There would be a knitting of the brows first, then an impatient tapping upon the table or the mantelpiece with his fingers, then the beginning of a sentence to interrupt her, then an ominous stillness, and at the end a mental pushing away of the subject, evidenced by a hasty, "My love, it can't be;" and after that would come an impenetrable mood, which was worse than any passion; a mood in which he spoke quite civilly to her, but said only just as much as was necessary, and vented his open irritation upon things in general. The only thing to arouse him from these moods was excitement. Perhaps the arrival of his visitors might be of use in this instance; but even then Jane was not sure that he would soon make friends with her again,—he did not always do so.

She feared all this, yet she longed to see him, and grew nervously anxious when he did not come in time. Mr. Ashton's accident frightened her, and every now and then fearful thoughts came over her of the sorrow there might be in store for herself. Her love for her husband was very great then; what might it not have been if he had proved himself all that she had once fondly expected? Jane had been saved from a great danger, though she was not aware of it. The tendency of her mind was to idolatry; it was a most Merciful Hand which was loosening the tie that might have bound her for ever to earth. She heard the lodge-gates open, and the carriage drive up the avenue, and when it came near the coachman stopped. Colonel Forbes looked out and nodded to her; but he did not offer to alight and walk with her, and she did not ask him. They met upon the hall-steps, with the usual rather hurried kiss. Colonel Forbes was full of indignation about the railway people. "They had been so provokingly negligent," he said; "he had actually lost a carpet-bag; and he had been detained in Rilworth to write and make inquiries about it." And two or three times he went over the history of where he had last seen the bag, and speculated upon whose fault it was. Jane listened, and was extremely sorry, and hoped he would not vex himself; and when his anger had a little subsided he stood warming himself with his back to the fire, which she had ordered to be lighted for him in his study, and asked her how she had been getting on.—"Tolerably," was Jane's reply. "There has been a good deal to try me."—"Try you, my dear?" He looked very much surprised. "What do you mean?"—"Only the accident," said Jane; "Mr. Ashton's accident, you know; I wrote you word."—"O! yes, I remember—very shocking indeed."

Poor Ashton ! Well !"—he did not quite like to say at once what was in his thoughts ; but it came out a very few moments afterwards : "the Protectionists will find his loss at the next election." —"Every one will find it, I think," said Jane ; "he was such a very useful person, and so honourable and sensible."—"Yes, he was a good fellow in his way," said the Colonel. "Is not dinner ready, Jane?"—"It was not ordered till seven," replied Jane, "and it is only a quarter-past six."—"A very foolish arrangement," he observed testily ; "I wrote you word to expect me at six."—"Yes, but there are so often delays," said Jane, gently ; "and I thought you would not have time to dress comfortably. Besides, I was not sure that you might not after all bring a friend with you, and then we should have been very much hurried."—"I wish, my dear, you would learn to believe that I mean what I say. I told you I should come alone at six o'clock. Dinner ought to have been ready at half-past six."—"I am very sorry," said Jane, meekly ; "perhaps it can be hastened."—"And spoilt!" exclaimed the Colonel. "No ; if we are to wait, let us at least have a dinner we can eat." He threw himself into an arm-chair, and Jane sat down opposite to him.—"Shall we have the children down?" she asked ; "there will be just time if they are not in bed."—He made no answer, but rang the bell. When it was answered the servant brought word that Mr. Ronaldson would be very glad to speak with Colonel Forbes if he was at leisure. The Colonel looked up impatiently : "Mr. who?"—"Mr. Ronaldson, sir."—"The Duke of Lowther's agent for the north," said Jane, quietly.—"Oh ! let him come up." The servant retired.—"What can possess people to trouble one at this hour?" continued the Colonel. "He is a friend of the Ashtons, isn't he, Jane?"—"Yes, a great friend," replied Jane ; "he is here, I suspect, on purpose to advise them —" "Then he had better advise John Ashton to pay more rent, or leave the farm ; there is nothing else will serve him."—"Must it be quite such an increase?" asked Jane, timidly. "It will come hard upon them now."—"My dear, I must beg you to leave those matters to me ;" and of course Jane was silenced.—"I suppose I had better leave you to talk over your business by yourselves," she said ; "so I will go and get ready for dinner." He did not take any notice of her. If he had she would have followed her natural impulse, and kissed him in remembrance that they had only just met ; but she wanted encouragement, and that he never gave. She went to her room and dressed for dinner, and then sat down to read, but without being able to attend, her thoughts were wandering so much to Katharine, and all she must

have been feeling that day. It was by Katharine's own wish that she had not gone to Moorlands to see her. There were likely to be strangers in the house, friends and connexions who had been present at the funeral, and Katharine felt for Jane what Jane would not have felt for herself, and did not wish to put her in the way of meeting persons she did not know.

The conversation with Charles Ronaldson lasted very long. The second dinner-bell had rung before Jane heard her husband enter his dressing-room. She had learnt to interpret even the way in which he shut his door, and she augured no good from its quick closing and the sliding of the bolt. She joined him when he came out of his room, and they walked down stairs together; and just before they went into the dining-room she ventured to ask whether Mr. Ronaldson's business was of much importance. "We will talk about it by-and-by," was the reply; and Jane blamed herself for indiscretion. They had a silent dinner, partly because the men-servants were in the room; partly, also, because Colonel Forbes gave such very short answers, that Jane did not know how to continue any subject. When, at last, the dessert was placed upon the table, and they were left alone, Jane thought she might once more allude to the subject so much in her thoughts. "You told me," she said, "that I might hear something of Mr. Ronaldson's business."—"Did I, my dear? it was nothing that concerns you."—"Oh!" Jane looked blank; and, after an instant's pause, added, by way of apology, "I did not think it concerned me, but I fancied it might have had something to do with the Ashtons."—"People are most strange in these days," exclaimed Colonel Forbes; "what possible reason can there be for my granting any special favour to John Ashton?"—"Only the remembrance of 'auld lang syne,' I suppose," suggested Jane.—"I don't know any thing about 'auld lang syne,' as you call it, Jane. I believe you have some sentimental remembrance of it, which makes you patronise Miss Ashton; but I must beg to say that I have none myself, and if I had I should not sacrifice the interests of the country to a foolish weakness." Jane did not at all know what to say next; but, finding her husband silent, she remarked that Mr. Ronaldson was such a very sensible, judicious person, she should not have imagined he would have made any unreasonable request. She said this merely because she did not wish to change the conversation suddenly, as though she were annoyed. Colonel Forbes, however, took it up sharply: "I wish, Jane, you would not misunderstand in the way you so constantly do. I never said that Mr. Ronaldson made an unreasonable request, or John Ashton, or any one. It may be all

perfectly reasonable, but I may not be inclined to grant it.”—
“Certainly not,” replied Jane; but even then she did not dare ask what the request was. It was mentioned, however, at last. “Ronaldson urges me to give John Ashton a trial at Moorlands for a year, before he takes a lease at the increased rent,” said Colonel Forbes.—“Oh! that was what Katharine wanted,” exclaimed Jane. Her husband turned round upon her instantly: “Then, my dear, why did you not tell me so? If you and Miss Ashton have been putting your heads together to plan the arrangement of my property, why not do me the favour to let me know what you have decided upon?”—“Oh! Philip,” exclaimed Jane reproachingly, “you know that is wrong; you know, quite well, that I never plan or decide upon any thing unknown to you.”—“I beg your pardon,” he replied, coldly; “I thought I understood you to say that the idea had been mentioned to you.”—“Yes, just mentioned in the course of conversation,” said Jane; “that is,”—and she blushed, for conscience reproached her with equivocation.—“Katharine told me what they wished, and asked me to write to you, but ———” “But what?” asked Colonel Forbes, sarcastically.—“I did not like to trouble you; I was afraid!” said Jane, still following the impulse of her most truthful mind, to say exactly what had been her motive. Yet she trembled, and not without cause. That word “afraid” touched a dangerous chord—one which from the very first beginning of their affection had produced a jarring note. “Afraid!” he repeated. “I am a tyrant then; my wife is afraid of me; she cannot give me the most trivial confidence! She can talk over my private affairs with her female friends, with Miss Ashton, the bookseller’s daughter, but she cannot come openly to me and tell me what it is of importance I should know.” He pushed aside his plate, rose from his chair, and paced the room. Jane thought she could speak, but she tried, and her voice failed her; and receiving no answer, he went on in the tone of a man who has been deeply injured. “You may think it of no consequence yourself, Jane, to keep up this stiff reserve between us; no doubt it does signify but little to you. My interests, I know, are of very slight consequence to you, except so far as they affect your own personal comfort; but I must take the opportunity of warning you, that you will do yourself and me material injury by persisting in this habit of keeping back every thing from me, and making me a stranger in my own house.” Jane’s humble self-upbraiding spirit made her seize upon the shadow of truth contained in this accusation, and she said, she knew she was cowardly, but she could not have thought, in the present instance, that it

could possibly be of consequence to him to know what had passed between Katharine Ashton and herself.—“Every thing is of consequence to me,” he repeated, his voice a very little softened; “I wish to know every thing; I have told you so repeatedly. You can be no judge what is of importance to me and what is not.” Jane could not in the least understand what she had done; but accustomed to be misconstrued, she had learnt how to behave so as not to irritate him further. So, without requiring an explanation, she only remarked that she should be wiser for the future. “You don’t see the working of things,” he continued, mollified by her gentleness; “it is one thing to say quietly to Katharine Ashton, through you, that the thing can’t be, and therefore it had better not be formally asked; and another to have to refuse point blank a man like Ronaldson—an old inhabitant of Rilworth—a man of influence. It gives me the character of a hard landlord; it sets people talking; it does me harm in a thousand ways. I wish, with all my heart I wish,” he added, “that old Ashton had been at the Antipodes before he made such a fool of me as to persuade me to let a good farm upon those absurd conditions.”—“I did not know there were any conditions,” replied Jane.—“Not that if John Ashton chooses to stay, and to pay the rent, I am bound to renew the lease?” said Colonel Forbes.—“No, I did not know it,” replied Jane; “I never thought about inquiring into such things.”—“Perhaps it might have been better if you had,” he replied sharply. “If Ashton chooses to remain upon my terms, I can’t say ‘No’ to him. It was a promise given when he took Moorlands.” Jane still could not see why this should vex him; and as his first irritation seemed to be subsiding, she ventured to ask him why he was so desirous that John Ashton should not stay. “When I stand as member for the county, which I certainly shall do at the next dissolution of Parliament, John Ashton’s vote will be against me,” was the reply. Member for the county! that was a totally new light to Jane. She might well have retaliated now upon him for want of confidence, but she was too humble and charitable for that, and she merely replied, that she had never understood before that he had any idea of the kind.—“Then you know it now, my dear; and it will teach you, I hope, how necessary it is to keep back nothing from me. Either I refuse John Ashton, and have Mr. Ronaldson talking about it to every one, and the world crying out upon me; or I keep him at Moorlands, and nourish an enemy at my own door. If I had only known the matter through you, I might have stopped it before it came to this.”—“I am very sorry, very sorry, indeed,” said Jane, though she could not see how any confidence

on her part could have prevented such a state of things. She rose to go up stairs to the drawing-room—her husband opened the door for her—she waited for an instant, and there was a movement as if she half-expected a kiss of reconciliation—but it was not to be: Colonel Forbes was in a mood. Every one who has experience of moody people will know what that implies. No one who has not can imagine it, even from description.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JANE did not see Katharine again at Moorlands for some time. The day after the funeral Mrs. Ashton expressed a strong wish to go back to Rilworth, and she was not in a condition to be thwarted. Charles Ronaldson, much to his own inconvenience, agreed to remain another day, in order to be with them, and help them; and he hoped also, by this delay, to bring their plans for the future into some definite form before his departure. If this were not done, he saw only interminable worry for all, especially for Katharine. Every one could wish, but no one could decide. Mrs. Ashton was bent upon living in the old house; Katharine inclined to the notion of going into a smaller one in Rilworth. Selina harped upon the necessity of remaining at Moorlands, under all circumstances; John declared it was impossible at the increased rent which Colonel Forbes demanded. When Charles was with them, his good sense and judgment, and kind sympathy, brought gentleness and harmony; and, notwithstanding the necessity of discussing business, the day of the funeral itself passed off peacefully. But the next morning Charles went off early to Rilworth Castle, and almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Ashton became restless and fretful,—fancied that there was a plan for keeping her at Moorlands against her will, and preventing her return to the old house, and insisted, as has been said, upon an instant removal. Katharine was not sorry for the change.—Moorlands was very trying to her. Selina was most provokingly selfish in argument; and the painful disturbance of the household during last week had made the children more unruly than ever. Her chief regret was for John, who looked very anxious and unhappy, and was bewildered by the new circumstances in which he found himself placed. Katharine was much touched by his manner just before they parted; his chief comfort would be taken away, he

said, when she was gone, and he had no heart to set to work at any thing, it was all so uncertain. He wished Selly could make up her mind to leave Moorlands at once, only he did not know what they should do then ;—go to Australia, perhaps, he could see nothing else for them. Katharine was for a moment startled at this reappearance of an idea which she had hoped at first was merely a discontented fancy ; but she knew her brother well enough not to oppose him directly, and warded off the subject by remarking that they should all see their way clearly, she had no doubt, in a few days ; and in the meantime they must be thankful they had such a friend as Charles Ronaldson to advise them. “Yes,” said John emphatically ; “there isn’t another like him to be found in these parts, or anywhere that I ever heard. Oh ! Kate, how could you ever——?” But Kate stopped him : “We won’t talk about that, John, dear ; it is best not.” She hurried upstairs to tell her mother that the fly was at the door ; perhaps she felt that it was better not to think as well as not to talk.

Very sad was that return to the old house. If it had not been for the constant attention which her mother required, Katharine would have given way entirely under the trial. So like, yet so different every thing was from what it had been ; and it was not a fortnight since that the world had seemed to be going on as quietly, as if it could never change ; or as if, when it did change, it would be by smooth, imperceptible degrees. Katharine had never realised to herself the possibility of any great shock in her life, it had been so even in its tenor hitherto ; but now it seemed as if something strange and frightening might come upon her at any moment. Her confidence in the stability of things had been shaken ; and, to add to the sudden rush of grief which came upon her continually, when she was quite unprepared for it, she felt herself nervously incapable of looking steadily upon the future, or of forming any plans which depended upon things remaining as they were. She had a feeling now that nothing could continue. Mr. Reeves came to visit them in the course of the afternoon, and soothed her a good deal. Her mother also liked to see him ; he read to her, and talked to her, and that not in a general way, but individually. He told her little things about her husband, which no one but himself knew ;—instances of Mr. Ashton’s kindness to persons in trouble ; remarks he had made, and questions he had asked, which showed a heart thoroughly repentant for its many sins and negligences, and resting its hope of acceptance upon the only sure Foundation. Mr. Ashton had been very reserved to his own family in all that personally concerned himself, but he had

talked to Mr. Reeves much more freely ; and though Katharine's tears fell bitterly, when she thought that opportunities for mutual sympathy upon these subjects were lost to her for ever in this world, the result of the conversation was to quiet and strengthen her mind, and render her more able to face the trials which might be before her.

Tea-time when it came was very overpowering, both for herself and her mother. It was impossible not to look at the shop-door, and think that it was going to open ; and there was the great chair placed where Mr. Ashton used to sit, and Katharine could not bear to put it aside ; and yet it looked so indescribably mournful, almost awful, she was quite glad when the servant came in, and accidentally put it out of its place ; she could not have moved it herself. After tea, things were a little better ; her mother began to work for the children at Moorlands, making up some common frocks out of an old black gown which she had by her, and this rather occupied her attention ; and she did not, as Katharine had feared she might, talk about the house, and insist upon remaining in it. About eight o'clock she was quite worn out, and went to bed ; and then Katharine sat down to try and collect her own thoughts, and form a judgment as to what was to be done ; a task quite impossible when, as had happened that day, every minute some person or duty claimed her attention.

If it had been necessary to think only for her mother and herself, a decision would have been easy enough — they must take a small house in Rilworth, and either sell the business entirely, or give it up to Henry Madden, with the agreement of receiving a certain sum from the profits. The latter plan would not have approved itself to Katharine's judgment, though, as having been proposed by her father, it would to her feelings, except for one reason ; — all the property of every kind was left to Mrs. Ashton during her lifetime ; and Katharine, conscious of her mother's weak affection for John, was afraid of the consequences of putting every thing she possessed within her reach at any moment. If John should be in difficulties, Mrs. Ashton would be certain to help him at whatever sacrifice to herself, or even to Katharine ; and unselfish though Katharine was, both by nature and habit, she could not but see that this might in the end bring ruin upon all. As long as they had a yearly income from the shop, however small, there would be something for them to depend upon, even in the event (which was very probable) of John's coming upon them for more help than he already had. His own share in his father's property was very nearly gone. It had been sunk in set-

ting him up in the farm, and assisting him since he had been carrying it on ; but he was now in a great degree free from debt ; and if he would only be wise and careful, and attend to Charles Ronaldson's instructions ; and if Selina would cease to be a fine lady, and give up her greenhouse, and her gay parties, and look after her servants, and work for her children, and superintend the domestic affairs of the farm, every thing might be well. But all this was doubtful, perhaps in Katharine's eyes rather more than doubtful ; and the large increase of rent which John was called upon to pay would in that case completely crush him. Katharine could not help feeling vexed with Colonel Forbes for driving them to a decision so quickly. If he could have been content to leave things as they were for one more year, they would have had time to judge correctly ; but now, with the necessity of coming to a conclusion at once, they were almost certain to make a mistake. Katharine thought over the business vaguely at first, and could not see her way out of the difficulties at all ; but then she became more methodical, and set herself to consider, first, what they must not do. Certainly they must not remain in the old house — that was put aside ; certainly John must not stay at Moorlands unless he could see his way to the payment of the increased rent ; certainly it would be a great expense to go from Moorlands ; certainly John was just as likely to fail in another farm as he was in that one ; and certainly, also, he was not fitted for any other kind of business, especially not for trade. All these points were quite clear to her mind, therefore it was clear also, that Moorlands would be likely to prove the best place, if the rent could be paid. There was but one way of managing that point. Katharine was very unwilling to believe it ; but the more she thought the more she was convinced that Charles Ronaldson's proposition was the only feasible one for all. She and her mother must go to Moorlands ; they must pay John a certain sum, as they would have done if they had taken another house, or gone into lodgings. Mrs. Ashton would superintend a great deal of the in-door work of the farm, to which she had been accustomed in her youth ; Katharine would take care of the children, and save expense by working for them, and would endeavour to check her brother when he was inclined to be extravagant, and urge him to exertion when tempted to be indolent ; and so, by all joining together, they might hope to go on with tolerable comfort. Katharine could not promise herself any thing more, she so very much disliked the plan, and saw so many difficulties and disagreeables in the way of its execution ; but it really did seem that to leave

John to himself just at this moment would be leaving him to ruin, and that would be far worse for them all than any annoyances which might be caused by the union of the two families. When once Katharine's judgment was convinced she was in a degree at rest. She could face any trouble when it was definite; and her good sense and strong religious feeling soon made her acquiesce in the plan, not as agreeable, but as necessary, and therefore, no doubt, intended to act in some way for their highest benefit. Her mother, she thought, would demur to it at first; but there was a good deal to tempt her in the plan, especially the idea of helping John, and having country occupations. It certainly was strange to herself to see how her opinions had changed since first the idea was suggested; but that fact gave her a most useful lesson in self-distrust. She had naturally very good judgment, and lately she had been accustomed to be so consulted, that she was in danger of depending upon her own opinions and her first impressions too much. To see that others had brought forward a plan contrary to her own, but which was likely to be the best in the end, was a very useful discipline. Besides, there was a great deal to be thankful for in the arrangement; family union first, then usefulness, to say nothing of the comfort of a country home and the satisfaction of being near Maplestead. Katharine could not feel happy, or look forward to any pleasure, but she could be grateful; and her last thought, when she laid her head upon her pillow, was of the "Mercy which had followed her all the days of her life."

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHARLES RONALDSON came early the next morning. He was to leave Rilworth at eleven o'clock. Katharine and he had a long conversation together before Mrs. Ashton was down stairs. Katharine put before him the result of her reflections of the previous evening, and received the sanction of his judgment. He was only afraid of two things; one, that Mrs. Ashton might be induced to spend more money upon John than was just and reasonable; the other, that Katharine herself would be worn out by the constant claims upon her time and exertions. They both foresaw that when Selina had a person with her able and willing to take from her the care of her children and her household, she would become more indolent and absent than ever. The only consolation, as

regarded the new plan, being, that she was not likely to be much better under any other circumstances. The same argument held good as to the probability of Mrs. Ashton's ruining herself by assisting her son. She would be as likely to do it if they lived separately as if they were together; and Katharine hoped, by constant care and watchfulness, to put a stop to the petty daily expenditure which Charles Ronaldson feared.

And so they talked for a long time upon matters of mere business; both as calmly, and apparently as unconcernedly as if no storm of suffering had ever passed over their heads. No one would have supposed that Charles Ronaldson had ever entertained a feeling for Katharine beyond that of hearty regard; and her manner was so entirely unconstrained, her thoughts so engaged by her home interests, that it was evident the very memory of the past days had for the time been blotted out. But the parting hour drew near. Mrs. Ashton was not quite ready to come down and say good-bye to him, as she wished; and Katharine went to help her, for she was afraid that Charles might be late for the London train. When she returned she found him standing by the mantelpiece, his head buried in his hands, and lost in thought. "My mother will be ready in less than ten minutes," she said; "can you wait? I think there is time if you have nothing else to do." He took out his watch: "I think there will be a quarter of an hour. I left my visit to you till the last."—"That was very good of you," said Katharine. "My mother will be very sorry not to have seen more of you; she would not have stayed in bed this morning if I had not forced her to it, fearing to miss you."—"I am very thankful to have been able to come," he said, "and I shall be very anxious to hear how you are getting on."—"I must write and tell you if we are in difficulty," said Katharine. The words were followed by a slight blush; she had spoken without consideration, and the thought crossed her mind that perhaps she had been forward; but then he was an old and tried friend, and engaged to be married, and she could not bear to think—she would not allow herself to think—that there was any reason why they should not be perfectly free with each other. "Would you really write?" he began eagerly; but the sentence was ended coldly, as he added, "You could not do me a greater favour." Katharine was a little pained; perhaps she had really been too forward, and he did not like it; and, as an indirect excuse, she said, "You are such a very old friend, and I don't know whom else I could apply to."—"I should have supposed Mr. Reeves might have been of use to you," he replied in the

same chilling tone.—“In some things; yes, in some,” replied Katharine; “but not in these business matters. Of course, though, I will not trouble you, unnecessarily.” She did not know whether he heard the latter part of her speech, for just then her mother came in, and Charles went up to her to shake hands, and ask how she was. Katharine was so uncomfortable at the change in his manner, that for an instant she forgot her usual attention to her mother, and thought only of herself. So silly and wrong it seemed in her to speak hastily, as she often did! Naturally enough he would think it strange that she should be the one to propose a correspondence, and yet she really meant nothing by it, nothing at all. If she had meant any thing she could not have spoken so freely. Time was passing quickly, and Charles had but a few minutes to spare, and these were engrossed by Mrs. Ashton. He did not think it wise just then to enter into any detailed plans for the future; but he told her, that he had been over the farm at Moorlands with John, and had looked into his accounts, and the result was that, with care, he thought John might do well there, if between them they could provide the increased rent. At any rate he was not worse off there than he would be elsewhere, supposing he still persisted in farming. Mrs. Ashton was much relieved at this opinion. Of all things she disliked changes, and just now they would have been peculiarly painful to her. She could not help feeling as if Charles had in some active way been instrumental in bringing about such a satisfactory idea, and her gratitude was most cordial. It had been a very great comfort, she said, to see him; and not to her only, but to John and Selina, and Katharine, to all of them, indeed; he had done for them what no other person could have done just then. “And now you are going,” she added, as he took up his hat, “and we shan’t see you again till one can’t say the time when.”—“It will not be so very long,” he replied; “at least, I hope not. There is likely to be business for me in this part of the world before long.”—“Indeed! and then we may hope that you will bring some one else to see us,” said Mrs. Ashton, with a mournful attempt to speak cheerfully, which Katharine was afraid might end in a burst of tears. “My mother is always talking of coming,” said Charles, “but the distance is very great for a person of her age.”—“If you will bring her to us——” began Mrs. Ashton; but the sentence was stopped by a remembrance that she might not have a house of her own in which to receive a guest, and she sobbed hysterically. Katharine was very much distressed for her, and almost as much so for Charles, who was:

impatient to go, and yet could not bear to leave her in such a state. Katharine brought her a glass of water, and after drinking a little she grew more composed, and tried again to resume the subject: "Kate and I shall be most glad to see your mother, wherever we may be, Charlie; tell her that from us. But I was not thinking so much of her, — there will be another Mrs. Ronaldson, won't there, before long?" Charles turned deadly pale, and he really could not speak. Katharine came to his assistance: "You must forgive us, Mr. Ronaldson; we cannot help being interested in all which interests you; but you shall tell us about it at your own time; only," she added, shaking hands with him warmly, "we wish you so much happiness." Katharine's voice was singularly firm, almost unnaturally so; there was not any feeling at all in it, unless it might have been the effort to repress feeling. Charles appeared in a manner stunned; he just said, "Thank you, thank you, good-bye;" and then it seemed to strike him that he had been remiss, and he came back again to Mrs. Ashton, and begged her to let him hear of any thing he could do for her. "There is his pencil-case; he has left his pencil-case, Kate," said Mrs. Ashton, as the door closed. Katharine hurried after him: "Mr. Ronaldson, your pencil-case; you have forgotten it." He turned at the sound of her voice, and his face was almost ghastly in its expression. "Good-bye, once more," said Katharine. — He kept her hand: "Miss Ashton — only one word — did you really think I was going to be married?" — "Yes, indeed." Katharine's heart beat very quickly, and, angry with herself — she did not know why — she added, "we were very glad to hear it." That was a sharp pang of conscience which followed. The words were not strictly true; but Charles could see nothing of the inmost heart, and, dropping her hand abruptly, he said stiffly, "I will ask you to contradict the report;" and they parted.

Katharine went back to her mother. Mrs. Ashton had eaten no breakfast, and Katharine tried to persuade her to take a cup of coffee, and said she would make it herself in the parlour. "Thank you, my dear; you don't look at all well yourself this morning," was Mrs. Ashton's reply; "won't you have some too?" — "No, thank you, mother, dear," replied Katharine; "I made a very good breakfast at eight o'clock;" and, turning away from Mrs. Ashton's scrutinising gaze, she busied herself in going in and out of the room to fetch what was wanted, and in stirring the fire, and putting on coals, for it was a chilly morning and almost autumnal, though the season would have been called summer. Mrs. Ashton did not talk very much; she did not seem

to have much heart for business, and probably did not like to disturb herself with the idea of the change which no doubt she felt in her secret heart might soon be necessary. Katharine did not sit down at all; and at last Mrs. Ashton grew fidgetty, and said she could not bear such incessant movement — if Katharine had things to do upstairs she had better go and see about them, and leave her to herself; she would try and work a little at the children's frocks. Katharine gave her her workbox, and threaded several needles for her; and then, kissing her, and begging her to be sure and ring the moment she wanted any thing, went away. And most thankful she was to go — to be alone. She did not think it would have been possible to remain under that restraint of feeling much longer, for she was so lonely, so unhappy; all the old grief had come upon her, and with a new bitterness. There was no one now to soothe her and thoroughly sympathise with her. The one person who could have done so was gone — quite gone, for ever it might be. The great distance between them was like for ever; and she could not write to him now, a barrier was between them — he was free. At that thought a feeling of gladness, which shocked and pained her, rose up in her heart. She would not own it to herself at first; but she was very true with herself — she never wilfully trifled with even the slightest suggestion of conscience, and presently she returned to the feeling and examined it. What made her feel glad? Selfishness, vanity — so at least she said to herself. She liked still to be first in his eyes — she would wish to be so even at the expense of his happiness. It was a very humiliating confession. Katharine felt as if for the first time she was learning the deceitfulness of her own heart. But how much she had to be thankful for; how much the mistake under which she had been labouring had helped her during the last few days! With her present wrong, silly, vain feelings it would have been impossible to have been quite at her ease with Charles as she had been. And she could understand now why he seemed to dislike the idea of her writing to him. Certainly it would have been an odd thing to offer if they had stood to each other in the same position as formerly; but he would perceive now how it happened that she ventured to propose such a thing; that was one comfort; she would be re-established in his good opinion if she had in any degree lost it. The very satisfaction however which this idea gave was a fresh cause for Katharine's self-condemnation. She said to herself that she cared too much for his good opinion; it was vanity still, and she was sure he would be shocked at it; for

in this last conversation he had given her the impression of being even more strict and severe in his judgment of right and wrong than he was in the old times. As to his retaining any feeling for her it could not be, he was quite altered. He had evidently no thought of any thing but business all the time he was with them ; and yet at the very minute Katharine said this, there was a lurking feeling of the contrary, which she instantly tried to stifle. All these conflicting notions were very unsafe for Katharine, they made her think of Charles Ronaldson more than was at all desirable for her peace of mind, or even her moral well-being. Nothing which makes us concentrate our thoughts upon ourselves can be good for any length of time, and self-examination is of all things the most likely to degenerate into morbid self-consciousness, if it is not carried on in a strictly religious spirit. It was happy for her that active duties were at hand to force into active thought ; yet even then there was the aching at the heart, the perpetual recurrence of some thought connected with him, the involuntary listening for his voice when the door-bell rang, with the absurd hope that something might have detained him, and he might be returned to wish them another good-bye. All this was worse than grief ; it lowered her in her own eyes, for she was constantly resolving to think of something else, and constantly breaking the resolution. Fortunately for Katharine she was not likely to be noticed whatever she might be thinking or feeling ; there was too much to make her unhappy for it to be a matter of surprise if she seemed so ; and though Mrs. Ashton several times during the day remarked how ill she looked, she always accounted for it, and added : " And indeed, my dear, no wonder ! "

The next day was Sunday, and they went to church in the afternoon. Mrs. Ashton bore it better than Katharine expected, and the effort enabled her to rally her spirits a little. She was more herself afterwards ; and when John walked in from Moorlands, as he did about five o'clock, intending to go to church at Rilworth in the evening, Mrs. Ashton was almost cheerful, and liked to hear about Selina and the children, and said she hoped to be able to see them again soon. This seemed rather an opening for introducing the proposed change ; but it happened to be nearly the time for evening service, and Katharine did not like to disturb the Sunday quietness by bringing forward an agitating subject ; and it was agreed therefore between John and herself that it should be mentioned to her the following day. John was indescribably relieved himself at the possibility of remaining at

Moorlands, and Katharine thought it was as much for the sake of domestic peace as for his own comfort. Selina's wishes were so very strong upon the point that she was not likely to leave him any peace until it was settled her way. So far Katharine was glad that Selina would look upon their living at Moorlands as a help and not a trial, which she very probably would have done under other circumstances.

The world was to begin in its old way on Monday morning. Katharine felt this bitterly. There was no excuse to be made any longer for not seeing persons if they chose to call, and business could not be put aside as it had been; but if duties were necessary, the only satisfactory way of performing them was to begin vigorously, and Katharine stifled her sorrow and steeled her heart, and immediately after breakfast entered with her mother upon the question of a removal to Moorlands.

How strange it is — what cowards we are, in spite of the lessons of faith which are so continually given us! Katharine introduced the subject timidly, dreading a long argument. She had not said more than a few sentences, when she found her mother not only willing, but even anxious to second the proposal. It had suggested itself to her own mind. Perhaps when away from Moorlands she missed more having the opinion and judgment of a man to lean upon; or it might be that she was cheered by the presence of the children; or, more likely still, the actual return to the old house had convinced her that she never could be happy in it again. Be this as it may, Katharine's difficulties melted into thin air when once she grasped them, and all that remained was to determine the lesser questions as to the disposal of the shop, the furniture, &c. These, at least, were the public questions. There were many peculiar only to Katharine, which harassed her a good deal. The district was one. She could not bear to give it up, and yet she felt that it must be done. Five years before, in her eagerness to embrace every opportunity of usefulness, she would have determined upon keeping it, trusting to be able so to arrange her occupations as to visit it every week; but experience had taught her many lessons, and, amongst others, that in attempting too much we seize upon work not intended for us, and in consequence accomplish nothing well. If she was to be useful at Moorlands, she could not also be useful in Rilworth. Mrs. Forbes, with the advantage of more leisure, and the command of carriages and horses, had tried it and failed, and Katharine, therefore, could not hope to succeed. It did not follow that she might not see her poor people, and interest herself about them; but this

would be different from undertaking an actual responsibility. Besides, it was evident that the Providence of God was preparing for her a new sphere of duty. Her business, therefore, was to do her best with that, and not to look with lingering regret upon one which it was His Will to take from her. And there were other sacrifices involved in the removal from Rilworth which none but Katharine herself could understand. She had gathered around her, within the last few years, several young persons in her own position in life, to whom she felt that her advice and assistance were very useful, and these must now be left in a great degree to themselves; and there were others, more of her own standing in age, but rather superior to herself in worldly rank, whose society had often given her both pleasure and profit. Some she was accustomed to meet at district meetings, or when some opportunity occurred for her being asked to drink tea at Mr. Reeves'; others she had been introduced to by Mrs. Reeves herself. They had greatly influenced and enlarged Katharine's mind, partly by conversation, and partly by lending her books, which every one seemed anxious to do, when once it was known that she was fond of reading. It was sad to think that all this must now be given up—that she must content herself with Selina's frivolous observations upon dress and the weather. If it had not been for her acquired habit of study she would have felt it even more; but reading was a much less effort now than it used to be, and the society of books she might always hope to have. Mr. Reeves would lend her any which he had, and the Miss Lockes were great readers, and were always anxious to send her any thing interesting which came in their way. Betsy Carter, too, though absurd in some respects, was sensible enough in others, and had often given Katharine very good advice as to books; and Katharine indulged an idea now, which before had not seemed necessary, that of joining a book society, so that she might always have the opportunity of reading without being dependent on the charity of her friends. How much she felt the value of Mr. Reeves' advice, when he made her take home the volumes of travels to finish! That had been the beginning of a habit which was now to be an incalculable comfort to her. If she had waited till the present time to begin, her mind would have been so ill-trained to attention, and the cares of life would have pressed so heavily upon her, that in all probability she would have found it no relief, but only a painful effort to read steadily.

Katharine could see all this in the midst of her great grief and her many anxieties. Hers was a bright, hopeful mind, always

looking out for the "silver lining" to the cloud ; and even when the aching pain, the sense of loneliness, and the self-reproach which had been present with her since Charles Ronaldson's departure, were the most wearing to her spirits, she had still thoughts and words of cheering comfort for her mother, and for herself the privilege of kneeling in her own chamber, and telling her troubles to Him who was always near to listen to them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I AM going into Rilworth this afternoon, Jane," said Colonel Forbes, on the Wednesday after Mr. Ashton's funeral ; "have you any business there?" Jane felt as if she must have, if it were only for the prospect of a drive with her husband alone. For the last two days the house had been full of gentlemen visitors, and she had seen nothing of him. Colonel Forbes happened to be in particularly good humour that morning. He had been listening to some judiciously administered flatteries : very judicious they were, he could not endure open praise ; but he liked to be consulted and deferred to, in manner, however, more than in words, for he was extremely fastidious, and, as is the case with most persons who are so, he piqued himself upon it. He thought it proved his good taste, and never for a moment supposed that it could be a mask for ill-temper. It had been suggested to him formally that morning that a seat for the county was more befitting a man of his fortune than to be member for the borough. The idea exactly chimed in with his own, and he did not make any foolish attempt to conceal it. He said he should wish it ; and he and his parliamentary friends had spent the morning in making calculations as to the probabilities of success, which were very satisfactory. Colonel Forbes was anxious to tell all this to his wife—she was his safety-valve ; he had no fear of appearing vain in her eyes and being misunderstood, and so he was very glad to seize upon the opportunity of a drive into Rilworth, short though it was, for a *tête-à-tête* ; and Jane, only too happy whenever he expressed the least inclination for her society, went to dress for her drive with a lighter heart than she had had for many days. "Where do you wish to go, my dear?" was Colonel Forbes' first question, as he seated himself by her side.—"To a good many places," replied Jane, "if there is time ; but if not, perhaps we had better

drive at once to Mrs. Ashton's, if you don't care. I must see Katharine if I can; she and her mother went off from Moorlands so suddenly." Colonel Forbes' brow was a little overcast at the mention of the name of Ashton; but he only told the servant rather impatiently to stop at Ashton the bookseller's, and reminded Jane that he should be in Rilworth but a very short time, so she had better not stay too long with Miss Ashton if she had any shopping to do. Jane very much wished to continue the subject, in the hope of obtaining from her husband something satisfactory as regarded Moorlands, but they were at peace at the moment, and she could not bear to disturb such rare and happy repose. She led the conversation, therefore, back again to the former topic — the prospect of Colonel Forbes' becoming member for the county. He had with him a list of the votes which he felt certain he could command in his immediate neighbourhood, and he gave it to Jane to read. "There are a good many more doubtful ones," he added; "but I wish to reckon only certainties." — "What name is this?" asked Jane, pointing to one which was written opposite to that of Moorlands Farm. Colonel Forbes bent down to look. "That?" He hesitated a little. "Oh! Andrews; he is a cousin of George Andrews. He wants the farm, and I think I shall let him have it; he is quite a sound man." Jane was perplexed, and, after a short pause, asked, though very timidly, "Is it really certain, then, that John Ashton is going to leave Moorlands?" — "Certain, if I am to believe what people say," he replied, testily; "Ronaldson told me Ashton could not afford the rent, and I can tell him he won't stay there if he can't." — "Oh!" was all Jane's answer; she could not again touch upon the dangerous ground of the year's delay.

They were then very near Rilworth. Jane was sorry that the drive was so short, and said so; and her husband was touched by her warm expression of feeling, and especially by the hearty way in which she had entered into his schemes, and once or twice called her his darling, apparently with the fondness of his first affection. This was indescribably sweet to poor Jane, for it was rarely that she heard such words; — all the past was forgotten in a moment, as if it had never been, and even his faults were not thought of. When she felt that he really loved her, how could she remember any thing painful? He had business at the Post-office, and at one or two other places where she could go with him. She could not help him in any way, and the business was not in the least likely to interest her, and he knew that she wished to have as much time as possible for Katharine Ashton; but now

that he was in good-humour he did not choose to part from her. So, instead of allowing her to go in and see Katharine at once, he merely went himself into the shop, gave some orders he wanted, and insisted, good-humouredly, but still in a way which admitted of no refusal, that Jane should drive with him to the Post-office, and the other places to which he wished to go at the further end of the town. Then, if she liked, she might manage, he said, a little shopping, whilst he went to see Mr. Andrews, and make her way to Mrs. Ashton's as the last thing; and there the carriage might call for her. It was just the most disagreeable, inconvenient, arrangement for Jane that could have been proposed. It wasted her time, shortened her visit to Katharine, and gave her a long walk, which was likely to be too much for her strength, and would probably tire her, and render her unfit for entertaining her visitors in the evening. She did say to him that it was rather far from Mill-place; where he proposed she should stop, to the top of High-street; but there was some difficulty about her having the carriage, as it interfered with a plan of his for taking Mr. Andrews with him to see Mr. Somebody else, who was likely to be a staunch ally; and Jane, always disliking to make difficulties, put her own comfort aside instantly, and said, that no doubt she should manage very well. "You won't find it as far as you think, my dear," was Colonel Forbes' comforting reply; and the order was given to drive to the other end of the town. They went to the Post-office, to the Bank, to the Town-hall, to the solicitor's office; the precious moments were diminishing fast, they were obliged to be at home again at half-past four; yet Jane did not even look impatient. At last they stopped at Mill-place, where a dressmaker lived whom Jane sometimes employed. Here at length she was set free; but before they parted Colonel Forbes took out his watch and made Jane compare hers with it:—"You are five minutes too slow, my dear; but that won't signify. I give you three-quarters of an hour from this time, then the carriage shall call for you at Ashton's."—"Might it not be an hour?" asked Jane; "I shall never finish all I have to do else."—He pointed to his watch: "Three-quarters of an hour will bring it just to four o'clock. We must be at home certainly by half-past; it ought to be earlier. I have an appointment, as you know." Jane looked disappointed; she really could not help it. "You had better put off seeing Miss Ashton till another day," said Colonel Forbes, as he remarked her manner; "you will only tire yourself by walking so far, and you are quite fagged as it is." Jane was frightened; in another moment she knew he would insist upon

her doing as he suggested. She did not say that she must see Katharine, or that she intended to do so, for that would have made him contradictory ; but she laughed and promised to take care of herself, and observed that she could cut short her shopping if it was necessary ; and, as he was in a hurry to go to Mr. Andrews, he was not inclined to stay and argue the point with her.

The dressmaker was gone out, but was expected to return immediately,—that delayed Jane at least ten minutes ; and then she found there had been some stupid mistakes about the children's frocks, and the consequence was a long discussion ; and when she left the dressmaker she was obliged to go to a shop which was near to purchase a toy she had promised little Lucy ; so that at last, even by giving up every thing else that she wished to do, and walking as fast as possible, she found that only ten minutes, or at the utmost a quarter of an hour, would remain for Katharine.

She did walk very fast, choosing back-streets, that she might not be noticed, or meet any one she knew. Her breath was very short, and her heart beat with a most oppressive quickness ; but Jane was accustomed to that, especially of late. Even going up the broad shallow stairs at Maplestead was sometimes more than she could quite bear. She went on, only thinking of Katharine, and knowing that she could rest when she was with her ; but on reaching Mrs. Ashton's door she felt indescribably ill ; she did not know what was the matter, but she had only just strength to ring the bell, and lean against the wall for support. The servant opened the door, saw her ghastly face, and very much frightened, ran back to call Katharine. Jane was a little recovered by this momentary rest ; but the fearfully rapid beating of her heart took from her the power of utterance. Katharine asked no questions, but led her into the parlour and made her lie down on the sofa, and Mrs. Ashton brought her sal-volatile. Jane several times tried to make an apology for intruding upon them, but her head was quite dizzy. She did, however, contrive to say at last that she had been walking too fast,—it was nothing but that ; and then she sat up a little, and tried to look as if nothing was the matter ; but the hollow indentations under her eyes, and the sallow lines around her mouth, showed that there was something very much the matter,—more, a great deal, Katharine was sure, than merely a momentary illness from walking too fast. That was not the time, however, for inquiry. Katharine's ready tact made her feel that Jane would be better just then by having her

thoughts drawn off from herself, and, Mrs. Ashton having left them to themselves, she begun, though it was a great effort to her, to talk of their own affairs. Jane was all interest in a moment, anxious to know how Mrs. Ashton had been since their return home; how she had borne the going to church on Sunday; and especially—a question which Jane put indirectly, but which was of more consequence than any other—what they intended to do for the future. Katharine was very open upon this subject, as she was upon almost all others, with Jane. There was such a peaceful feeling of trust when conversing with her, that it was quite rest to tell her all their plans. To remain at Moorlands, she said, was considered the best thing for her brother, and as this could only be managed by his having some assistance from his mother, it was settled that they should all live there together. Another lease therefore would be taken for five years. Her mother, she added, talked of removing to Moorlands finally in about a fortnight's time; the business was to be taken by Henry Madden, who would bind himself to give them a certain yearly income out of the profits of the shop. Katharine was eager in explaining all this, and giving the reasons for their determination; and especially she wished to make Jane feel that they had no unkind feeling against Colonel Forbes for his refusal to accede to the year's delay. She was in consequence so engrossed in what she was saying, that she did not at once perceive the change in Jane's countenance when she heard it mentioned as a settled thing that John Ashton would remain at Moorlands. She noticed, however, after a little while, that Jane looked ill again, and begged her to have some more *sal volatile*, or a glass of wine. Jane declined every thing; there was nothing the matter she said; and, turning Katharine's attention from herself, she asked, in what she meant to be a very unconcerned tone, whether the plan of their all living together at Moorlands was perfectly fixed. "Yes," was Katharine's reply; "as far as any thing can be. But, dear Mrs. Forbes, why do you ask? don't you think it a wise arrangement?" Jane was infinitely perplexed, and hesitated to answer. "If you see any objections," continued Katharine, "it would be very kind in you to mention them now, whilst there is yet time to draw back. Would you advise us to alter the arrangement?" No, Jane could not in conscience do that; it was so clear, so indisputably clear, from what Katharine had told her, that no other plan was likely to be safe; but she tried to avoid an answer. She could not be a judge, she said; Katharine must have friends much better calcu-

lated to give an opinion. — “Perhaps so,” said Katharine, a little disappointed; “but there is not one I should care for as much; that is, except,” — and she coloured a little, — “except Mr. Ronaldson’s, and he is quite satisfied that it is the best thing to be done.” — “Oh! then, be contented,” exclaimed Jane, rejoiced to escape the necessity of giving her own judgment; “whatever Mr. Ronaldson says will be best, is so, you may be quite certain of that.” — “He is a very prudent person, and knows a great deal about farming,” observed Katharine, speaking with consideration. “He says that if John were to remove to another farm the cost of moving would probably swallow up the difference of rent for a year or two, even if he could find a cheaper farm than Moorlands, which we do not any of us think he could do. Our old objection,” she added, “used to be, that the house was too large; but if my mother and I live with him that will in a great measure be done away.” — “It does seem very feasible,” observed Jane, not liking to show any thing like deficient interest in that which just then was so important to Katharine. “And you will be near me,” she added, with one of her sweetest smiles, “and we can go shares with the poor people; it will be very nice.” There was the very least effort of manner still, but Katharine was always trusting; she never weighed the words and looks of those whom she truly loved. Mrs. Forbes was the last person whose affection she could in the least doubt; and though she noticed her restraint, she still attributed it entirely to illness. “You must not tire Mrs. Forbes, Kate, my dear,” said Mrs. Ashton, coming again into the room, just as they were about to begin a different subject. — “The carriage will be here in a minute; I think I hear it,” said Jane, accustomed to the sound of the wheels. Katharine went into the passage to look. “Yes, here it is! and Colonel Forbes, and Mr. Andrews in it.” Jane’s heart sank. She was still feeling extremely unwell, and these political acquaintances were at all times extremely fatiguing to her, because she was afraid of not showing them sufficient attention to satisfy her husband or themselves. She drew her shawl round her and put on her bonnet with a lingering wish to delay what was just then so disagreeable, the necessity of being civil to the obtrusive Mr. Andrews. “I can’t say I look very beautiful,” she said, smiling, as she glanced at her own wan face, and arranged her hair by the little, long, old-fashioned glass over the mantelpiece. — “I don’t know what Colonel Forbes will think,” said Mrs. Ashton; “I am afraid he will say that Kitty has been tiring you out. But I hope, my dear ma’am, that you will take care of yourself when

you get home. You really ought to rest well this evening."—"My mother will have no peace till she hears how you are," said Katharine affectionately; "and indeed I think she is right. Will you please not talk much to Mr. Andrews, if he is going back to Maplestead with you?"—"If you will please prevent him from thinking me very rude, if I am silent," replied Jane, with a playful smile; "but now I really must go; good-bye;" and she shook hands cordially with Mrs. Ashton. "Good-bye, dear Katharine; I must see or hear something of you again before long." Her step, usually so light, and yet so full of energy, was now weak and slow; and Katharine looked anxiously after her as she seated herself in the carriage.—"There are some people who seem too good for this world," said Mrs. Ashton, sighing, as she took up her work. Katharine did not immediately reply, and no one would have perceived the connection that really existed between the silence which then followed, and the question put, as if accidentally, more than an hour afterwards,— "Mother, did you say that that thin, sallow-faced woman, who came begging this morning, looked as if she had a heart complaint?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JANE did talk all the way home, for Mr. Andrews talked to her, and she could not but answer him. He thought it his duty to be polite, and flattered himself that he could not fail to be agreeable; moreover he was as much gratified to be taken into Colonel Forbes' confidence, and carried to Maplestead, to give electioneering information, as the Colonel himself was to be admitted to the secrets of persons connected with the Ministry, and asked to give his opinion on the great questions of the day. Most men are talkative when they are pleased and excited, and Jane therefore had the full benefit of Mr. Andrews' self-congratulations, for her husband was so full of thought that he did not notice how ill and tired she looked, and only joined in the conversation every now and then; or rather interrupted it with some question proper to his own musings.

Happily it was a very short drive; yet short as it was it seemed almost interminable to Jane, the effort of talking and keeping up her attention was so great; and once or twice she found herself answering quite wide of the mark, and then she was frightened,

and roused herself more. Of all things Colonel Forbes was annoyed with any thing like neglect of his political adherents; and though he seemed abstracted, Jane could not be at all sure that he was not seeing and hearing every thing that passed, and treasuring it all in his memory to be brought forward against her on some future occasion. She talked a great deal more than she would have done if he had not been there, more than was at all necessary; but in his presence every power of her mind was at all times strained.

He did at last see that she was weary and looking ill, but that was not till they had reached the lodge at the entrance of the beech avenue, and then he told her that she had better keep quiet till dinner-time. Jane's very earnest wish would have been to ask him to excuse her going in to dinner; but she could not propose it herself with Mr. Andrews sitting by, and her husband was not likely to suggest it and make an excuse for her.

It was an infinite relief to find herself at last alone in her own room, with her maid ready to bring her every thing she wanted. The feeling of comfort seemed even a reproach to her for having for a moment inwardly repined; but it was not to last very long. She was lying on the sofa in her dressing-room, and trying to sleep, when Colonel Forbes' step was heard along the passage. Jane started up, for he was coming towards her door. What was the matter? That was always the question which came first to her mind. There did not seem much the matter, however; not any thing, indeed. He was quite good-humoured, only a little impatient at her not being well, and anxious to know if she was going down stairs. The conference was over, and Mr. Andrews, who had been asked to stay and dine, was sitting by himself in the drawing-room, and Colonel Forbes was too busy to attend to him. He did not say that of all fatigues he thought talking to Mr. Andrews upon any but political subjects the greatest. Jane asked if Mr. Andrews could not be shown to his room to dress for dinner.—“It wants an hour to dinner yet, my dear. I can't send him there so soon.” Jane sat up; her manner was languid, and her voice weak, and Colonel Forbes was irritated. “It was very provoking in her,” he said, “to walk such a distance when she knew it would do her harm. It was that absurd fancy for the Ashtons which was at the bottom of it all; and he really must put a stop to it, if it went on. It would not do to have her killing herself for nothing.”—“I don't think it was merely the distance,” replied Jane gently; “but walking so fast, which always tries me.”—“Then, my dear, why did you walk fast?”—“Because

there was so little time," she replied.—"Better have given it up altogether," said Colonel Forbes. "I must keep you quiet, Jane. Dr. Lowe said to me, only the other day, that quiet was essential to you; but whenever you have an idea in your head, it must be carried out; wise or foolish, it must be done. I never saw any one so determined."—"It was very foolish," replied Jane; "I will be more careful in future; and I will go down stairs, now, and entertain Mr. Andrews."—"I would not say any thing about it if he were a personal friend," said Colonel Forbes, betraying, unknown to himself, that his conscience was not easy; "but these Rilworth people are so very tenacious, and it might appear uncivil if you kept away entirely; and really I have exhausted all I have to say to him, for I have been talking for the last hour, till in fact I am nearly worn out."—"And is the result satisfactory?" asked Jane, willing by any means to avoid subjects which might lead to a storm.—"Why, yes, upon the whole, I think it is. When his cousin takes Moorlands——" Jane's maid knocked at the door; she was come to see how her mistress was. Colonel Forbes was stopped in the middle of his sentence; "Then, my dear, you will go down to Mr. Andrews."—"Yes, directly."—He kissed her. "Take care of yourself, my love. Dawson, I think your mistress would be the better for some drops of camphor julep." And he went away, thinking himself the very pattern of an affectionate husband.

When Jane went to the drawing-room she found Mr. Andrews seated in a comfortable arm-chair, reading the newspaper. She might just as well, therefore, have remained in her own room; but having once made her appearance it was necessary to stay, especially as Mr. Andrews put aside the newspaper as soon as she entered the room. What they would have found to talk about for the next hour, having previously exhausted all subjects in common during the drive from Rilworth, it would have been impossible to say, but that Mr. Andrews happened to touch upon the subject of Moorlands, and from thence naturally enlarged upon the Ashtons, of whom he gave his opinion freely. "Old Ashton," he said, "was a good sort of fellow enough; crotchety, and difficult to manage, but honest and shrewd. As for John Ashton, he was neither the one nor the other; he had not wit enough to get money, or if he did get it, he had not enough to know what to do with it. As I have been telling the Colonel," he continued, in his loud, pompous voice, "it was a bad day when he let one of the best farms on his estate to a man like John Ashton; and a very good one it will be when he gets my cousin

to take his place. You see, my dear ma'am, in farms, as in every thing else, the secret of success depends upon capital—capital, that's the thing wanted. Now, John Ashton never had any of his own—it was all a speculation of his father's; and old Ashton did not lay out half the money a man would have done who had the farm in his own hands, and so, between the two stools, our friend the Colonel's interest fell to the ground.”—Jane inwardly winced at “our friend the Colonel,” but outwardly she was most laudably civil and forbearing; and being really anxious to know how far her husband considered Moorlands to be in his own power, she inquired whether it was really certain that Mr. John Ashton was to leave it. “Unquestionably, ma'am,” replied Mr. Andrews, opening his quick grey eyes to their fullest extent, in surprise at her apparent ignorance; “it must be: politically (between ourselves), it must be; the Colonel can't afford to lose a vote. As he and I were reckoning just now, it will be a close run, under any circumstances.” Jane was going to say that it was at John Ashton's option to leave the farm, but she did not know how far her husband might have explained the conditions on which it was originally taken, and she could only look thoughtful and be silent. “You need not be frightened, my dear ma'am,” continued Mr. Andrews, patronisingly, thinking that her gravity proceeded from anxiety as to the election; “we won't let the Colonel run any risk. If he plays his game well, he's sure of it, only we must keep a sharp look out—we mustn't have traitors at our door.”—“I should have thought,” said Jane, “that Mr. John Ashton was not a person to have any decided opinion of his own upon these political questions. Old Mr. Ashton thought a great deal about them, I know; but his son has not half his cleverness.”—“A man must be a fool indeed who can't have an eye to his own interests,” replied Mr. Andrews. “John Ashton has wit enough to see that he is a richer man himself with Protection than without it, and he won't look a step beyond that; he has no large views like the Colonel, and if he were to profess to change, who would trust him? Not I, as I said to the Colonel, just now. —‘Colonel,’ said I, ‘let us have a safe man at Moorlands.’ Now my cousin is a safe man—an Anti-Protectionist to the backbone. He'd go through fire and water for the point.”—Jane felt as if going through fire and water would have been an easy penance compared with that which she was enduring, as Mr. Andrews drew his chair nearer to hers, and became more and more dogmatic and familiar. He was not a man to be kept back by ordinary stiff civility, and any thing more decided would have

been against her husband's political interests; so she endured it as well as she could, and Mr. Andrews went on enlarging upon his own sayings and doings to his heart's content. "We were talking over John Ashton's case just now," he said; "all of us; and some of the Colonel's London friends were inclined to mercy, in consideration of the good effect it might have upon public opinion; 'but,' said I, 'Colonel, don't listen to that; "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and has been so always. Secure your vote,—that's the first thing to be done—and leave public opinion to itself. And, after all, there's nothing to be said about the matter. You give the man a fair option—pay your rent and stay, don't pay and go. He can't pay, and he goes; who's to blame for that? As for any half-measures, trying for a year, and so forth, where's the good? and in the meantime comes a dissolution, as it may come any day, and there's your vote clear gone.'—"Then it is understood that if the increased rent is paid he may stay," said Jane, rather anxiously.—"But he can't pay, he won't pay, he mustn't pay, my dear ma'am," exclaimed Mr. Andrews, with a curiously evident effort to keep down excessive irritation at the idea which Jane had propounded.—"Only if he can, he may," persisted Jane.—"But he can't, my dear ma'am, he can't; he says so." Jane was silent and very uncomfortable. Fortunately for her the dressing-bell just then rang, and she was able to retire; but it was not before her manner had been remarked by the shrewd eye of Mr. Andrews, who was always keenly alive to the possibility of having a traitor in the political camp, and perfectly well aware of Jane's predilection for Katharine Ashton, and consequent interest in her family.

Jane dressed quickly, that she might have another rest before dinner; but she could not rest in mind. Perhaps it was physical fatigue which made her peculiarly nervous, but certainly she had seldom been so inclined to forebode annoyance, and even worse, to herself and to others. She felt guilty, as it were, of planning against her husband, for all her wishes were for Katharine. In her own mind she went over and over again all that had passed in her late interview, trying to recollect whether she had in any way encouraged her in the idea of removing to Moorlands; but she could only remember one thing clearly, that she had said that whatever Charles Ronaldson advised must be right, or something to that effect. She could not in conscience have given a different opinion, that was quite certain; for the more she thought over the plan, the more she was convinced that it was the best which, under the circumstances, Mrs. Ashton could adopt. But

this would not satisfy Colonel Forbes ; and to be thwarted in his favourite plan—to find an obstacle, however slight, in the way of his ambition !—Jane trembled at the consequences. She had, as yet, as she well knew, seen only the shadow of his anger, heard only its distant mutterings ; but she had seen and heard enough to know, that once thoroughly awakened, it would be very terrible.

She listened, hoping that he might come to her room before he went down stairs ; for she thought it might be well to break the matter gently to him, and, if possible, to soften his annoyance. At any rate, it would be better than leaving him to hear the fact first from John Ashton, with whom he would not be likely to exercise much restraint ; but time slipped away and he did not come, and when she went to the drawing-room he still did not make his appearance for a long time, not indeed till dinner was announced. He came into the room then with Mr. Andrews, looking !—Jane felt the look ; she did not think any one else did. Colonel Forbes was always polished, courteous, attentive ; he had never been more studiously careful in his behaviour to every one, to his wife especially, than on this day ; but the dark thunder cloud gathering in the far horizon could not more certainly foretell to the traveller an approaching storm, than did the peculiar undertone of his voice and a deep line in his forehead portend to Jane a torrent of anger. He talked a good deal upon all subjects, except politics ; these he seemed to avoid, although several political friends were with him, and Mr. Andrews found no other subject in any way interesting, and therefore tried to introduce it at every opportunity. Jane, as the only lady present, was obliged to exert herself generally, and perhaps this was fortunate for her ; she could not, as she might otherwise have been tempted to do, watch her husband's face, and ponder upon the meaning of every intonation of his voice. Even as it was, she heard every word spoken by him, whatever might be the conversation she was carrying on with others, and often found it difficult to reply properly to the observations addressed to her, in her anxiety to lose nothing which might throw a light upon the secret cause of his displeasure.

But she could obtain no clue, and might almost have thought herself fanciful in supposing there was any thing amiss, but for his peculiarly formal tone when speaking to herself. That she could not mistake ; it was so evident, that she was afraid others might notice it, and she could not indeed feel certain that Mr. Andrews did not. He certainly watched them both narrowly, for Jane remarked that he often cut short his own conversation to listen to what either of them said.

The common-place subjects of the day were soon exhausted. Jane felt the necessity of keeping up the conversation, and tried to think of some new topic, but her mind seemed a blank; and with that unfortunate fatality which so often seems to force us to say the very things we had better not, she inquired of Mr. Andrews whether it was true that the Duke of Lowther had given the management of his Rilworth estates to his northern agent, Mr. Ronaldson. Mr. Andrews, flattered at any thing like a confidential question, professed not to know, but thought it extremely unlikely, as the Duke's bailiff had been with him that very day and had not mentioned the subject. He could find out, however, he said, if Mrs. Forbes had the least curiosity upon the subject, —he could find out without fail; indeed he should have an opportunity of asking the very next day, and he would send Mrs. Forbes word. —Jane was half-amused and half-provoked at his officiousness, but professed not to care about it, except that she believed Mr. Ronaldson to be a very estimable person, and she thought it might be a desirable thing to have him in the neighbourhood. —“Desirable for many people, no doubt,” replied Mr. Andrews, with an unpleasant confidential wink of the eye. “Of course, Mrs. Forbes, so kindly interested as you have always been in the Ashtons, you know the report?” —Jane was aware that her husband's eye was upon her, and she blushed without meaning it. —“It's more than a report,” continued Mr. Andrews, finding by her silence that he was not to be encouraged to repeat it. “Ronaldson and Katharine Ashton are to be married, so it is said, for certain.” —Jane started, and her eyes sparkled with satisfaction. “Oh! Mr. Andrews!” she exclaimed, “when did you hear such good news?” —“Jane, Mr. Trevor has been waiting to speak to you for the last half-hour,” exclaimed Colonel Forbes in a tone like the faint growlings of thunder. Jane apologised most politely; but Mr. Trevor only wished to offer her some grapes, and Mr. Andrews returned again to his subject. —“It is the common talk in Rilworth,” he said. “Of course it's rather early to speak of such things so soon after old Ashton's death; but there is no doubt, I believe, as to the truth of the report; in fact, from what I understand, it is quite an old affair.” There was much food for thought to Jane in this announcement. It might ultimately interfere with the proposed removal to Moorlands; and, independent of her satisfaction at such a prospect for Katharine, she could not help feeling relieved at any thing which might prevent the storm she anticipated from her husband. She quite longed to hear the news more fully confirmed, but Mr.

Andrews had nothing more than general rumour to give her, though he was entirely confident of its truth. Jane's spirits rose at the idea, and she talked with greater animation and more generally, till she happened to glance at her husband. He was sitting silent, his eyes were fixed upon her, and his thoughts were seemingly so absorbed as to render him unconscious of the presence of his guests. Jane thought for a moment, as she noticed his look of distressed gravity, that he was ill; but after a few seconds he seemed to rally again, though still, to her perception, all he said was an effort. The change in him was quite sufficient to make a change in her. She stopped almost suddenly in the midst of a remark she was making, and a painful, frightened feeling of nervousness came over her, which took all the colour from her cheeks, and attracted the notice of her neighbour Mr. Trevor. Jane might have managed pretty well if left to herself, but notice aggravated the evil, and made her realise that she was feeling most uncomfortable. She rose and said she would go to the drawing-room, and the general attention was directed towards her. Colonel Forbes could not help perceiving that something was the matter; for Jane's step was so trembling that Mr. Trevor was upon the point of offering her his arm. He went up to her, and forcing her to lean upon him, said in a low tone, "Pray exert yourself for a few moments;" and Jane did exert herself, quite sharing in his dislike to scenes. She sat down in the hall, her heart still beating with painful, choking rapidity. She did not dare say that it was over-fatigue, lest she should again be reproached with her long walk, and she did not think it was any thing physical which caused her to feel as she did. One kind word from her husband, one assurance that he was not displeased with her, would have quieted her more than the skill of the wisest physician. But she had no word; only the most formal, polite attention, such as an utter stranger in her case might have expected. They went into the drawing-room; it was nearer than the dressing-room, and Jane thought that to go there would seem less troublesome, less as if she wanted to make herself appear very ill. For the same reason she sat down in an armchair instead of lying down on a sofa. Colonel Forbes was just going to ring for Dawson and leave her, but she prevented him; she wished, she said, to be alone. "My dear, you are ill, and you must have some one with you." He touched the bell again.—"Please, dear Philip—please not. Could not——" She hesitated, and the sentence was finished hurriedly; "must you go back to the dining-room?"—"Of course, my dear; I can't

leave my friends, it would be too absurd.”—“But only just for a few minutes. I wanted to say—Philip are you angry with me?” She put her hand upon his, and fixed her soft, clear eyes upon his face with an expression of the most eager affection, mingled with suspense.—“We will talk of that by-and-by, my dear; I wish for no more scenes.”—Jane’s eyes were dimmed then; yet her spirit was a little aroused, and she said, “There would be less chance of a scene if I were less worried by your manner, Philip. You are angry, and I must know why.”—“You will not understand if I tell you,” he answered. “You have chosen to make to yourself interests apart from mine, and of course nothing that I am feeling can affect you.”—Jane was silent. The accusation was very old, and most unsatisfactorily vague.—“It can be no fancy of mine,” continued Colonel Forbes, speaking as if greatly aggrieved, “when even strangers remark it.”—“Strangers!” exclaimed Jane, hastily. “Oh! Philip, who has ventured——” He interrupted her: “I can see no venturing, as you call it, in drawing deductions from observations which are made voluntarily. It is what every one is at liberty to do; but I really must leave you, Jane; I can’t be rude to my guests.”—“Only one minute more, Philip,” exclaimed Jane; “they will not expect you; they know that I am not well.”—“One minute will do no good,” he answered hastily, “nor ten, nor twenty minutes; I do not want words, but actions.”—“I would act if I knew how,” replied Jane; “but indeed, Philip, you make me very wretched by these vague complaints. If you would only tell me what I have done!”—“I do not accuse you of doing,” he answered very coldly.—“Then of saying. What have I said? Was it any thing that passed with Mr. Andrews?”—“Conscience, I perceive,” remarked Colonel Forbes, with a scornful smile. “You best know what passed between yourself and Mr. Andrews.” Jane tried to collect her thoughts, to remember every word she had spoken, but her memory was sadly confused. “It is useless to try and recollect any particular expression,” continued Colonel Forbes, seeing her perplexed look, and it is not of any thing particular that I complain, but simply of that general want of interest in my interests, and of devotion to those of others, which is obvious even to strangers.”—“You mean about the Ashtons,” said Jane, a light breaking in upon her mind. “I don’t quite know what I said to him.”—“Of course not. Of course you cannot remember what came so naturally from your lips. You cannot know what your manner was, but I can, and I do know, Jane. Mr. Andrews looks upon you as entirely in the Ashton interest.”—Jane’s temper, though very

sweet, was sorely tried by this constant reference to a man like Mr. Andrews; and she replied with a little bitterness of tone, "It is a new thing for you, Philip, to listen to Mr. Andrews in preference to your wife."—"I must beg you to command yourself, Jane," replied Colonel Forbes: "we shall do no good by irritating each other. You would not have me distrust Mr. Andrews' word, I suppose."—"I must first hear what he said," answered Jane, doing her very utmost to appear what she was not, either physically or mentally—quite calm.—"He informed me," continued Colonel Forbes, "that you had expressed yourself as being deeply interested in the Ashtons, and that you had even gone so far as to suggest the probability of entirely counteracting my wishes; that, in fact—but it is useless to pursue the subject," he added, drawing himself up haughtily; "you know better than I can tell you how far this infatuated predilection for persons quite out of your sphere leads you astray from the path of duty."—"You are not just to me, Philip," replied Jane, every limb trembling with agitation, which she vainly strove to subdue; "God knows that I would not willingly swerve a hair's breadth from the path of duty, even for you, dear though you are to me, dearer than my own life. I said to Mr. Andrews—I forget what I said—I think I only asked questions. I wished to know whether it was quite certain that Moorlands must be given up."—"And you suggested the probability of John Ashton's remaining there," observed Colonel Forbes; "and, more than that, you were glad of it; you would have furthered their wishes against mine."—"I would have that done which is honourable and right," replied Jane; "and I was anxious for them because——" She hesitated.—"Because what? It is better that I should know the plots that are forming against me." Jane turned excessively pale and leant back in her chair. "Then you do know there is a plot," exclaimed Colonel Forbes, his voice raised to a pitch of sudden and violent anger. "You have been joining in it yourself probably; yes, you were so anxious to go there to-day; you must needs go, though it made you, as you acknowledged, very ill. I see it all; I want no words—my wife is against me. I might have known it from the beginning." He walked up and down the room rapidly; then in a moment checked himself, and, coming up to Jane, who was too frightened at his vehemence to attempt any exculpation, he said very gravely, but with a sternness which made her shudder, "Tell me every thing, I have a right to know, and I will know."—Jane made a great effort to speak, her voice was very low, and he bent down to listen: "I always meant to tell you, Philip—I

knew you ought to know it. They will not leave Moorlands—Katharine said so to-day—they will join together and live there.”—Colonel Forbes clenched the arm of her chair. “And you approved, Jane?”—“I did not know what to say—it seemed the best plan.”—“But you said—tell me, I must and will know.”—“I said—I don’t know—I don’t remember exactly, only I think it seemed to me that whatever Mr. Ronaldson advised was likely to be best.”—“And Mr. Ronaldson’s advice was that they should remain?”—“Yes, I believe so.”—“And you advised the same?”—“Yes; that is, I did not advise.”—“Let me have no equivocation—you advised the same?”—“I can’t quite recollect, I was feeling very ill. Oh! Philip, why will you torture me?” and Jane burst into tears. Colonel Forbes left the room and brought back a glass of water, which he offered her without speaking. Jane pushed it aside. “Let me go to my room,” she said, in a faint voice; and she stood up, holding by the mantelpiece.—“Your room will be the best place for you,” he replied coldly, and he rang the bell. Jane rested her hand upon his shoulder and looked pleadingly in his face. “I meant no wrong, dear Philip; will you not forgive me?” He withdrew from her light touch, and Jane’s hand at the same moment fell powerless by her side, and with a sharp cry of intense bodily anguish she sank senseless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“MOTHER,” said Katharine, the next morning, “don’t you think I had better go and see Miss Ronaldson to-day, if there is time? Betsy Carter says she is very poorly.”—“As you like, Kitty,” was Mrs. Ashton’s reply; “but there’s a great deal to be done, one way and another. When did you say John wanted us to be at Moorlands?”—“Thursday-week,” replied Katharine. “That will leave us just ten days.”—Mrs. Ashton heaved a deep sigh. “It’s very soon,” she said; “I don’t see at all how every thing is to be managed in such a hurry. We must have Henry Madden in to look at the furniture, and see what he has a fancy for.”—“And what we like we can take over to Moorlands,” continued Katharine; “that is one very great comfort. I should have been dreadfully sorry to part with some things,” and her eye glanced at the armchair.—“Yes, we must keep that,” said Mrs. Ashton, following the direction of Katharine’s glance; “and the table too.” It was a small table, standing between the fireplace and the

window, with a desk upon it, at which Mr. Ashton had been in the habit of writing his business letters. His picture hung above it; rather a coarse painting, but a very good likeness. Katharine looked at the picture for a few moments, and then said, "We had better manage to take that over ourselves, mother; it won't do to trust it in the cart. Mr. Fowler told me the other day he knew some one who packed pictures particularly well; Hobbs, I think the name was, in Dean Street. Perhaps if I go out, I had better call and speak about it."—"Yes, if you must go," said Mrs. Ashton, who was beginning to feel so nervously fond of Katharine, and so dependent upon her, that she could scarcely bear her to be out of her sight.—"I would not go if I could help it, dear mother," said Katharine; "but there are some things I must see about, and you would not like me to be unkind to Miss Ronaldson, would you?"—"No child, surely not, when Charlie has been so kind to us, but don't stay long; and, now I think of it, has any one heard from Charlie since he went away?" Katharine was conscious that she blushed a little, and the feeling made her blush still more. "John has heard from him," she replied; "he got quite safe home, and his mother was quite well, he says."—"And he must be glad enough to be there," continued Mrs. Ashton; "though he has not such good prospects as we thought. I could have wished, Kate—but never mind, that's all amongst by-gones, and I couldn't have borne to have you living away." Katharine hurried out of the room with the words "it's all amongst by-gones" echoing in her ears, and haunting her mind like the tone of a mournful chant.

She went on her errand—first to the upholsterer's to speak about taking some useless chairs off their hands; then to the china-shop to match some jugs and basins which were to be carried with them to Moorlands; then to the charwoman in Pebble-street, to tell her that she must come and help them all the next week; and at last to Hobbs, the carpenter, to speak about packing the picture. But the man was not at home, and his wife did not know when he would be; she thought he was at Mr. Fowler's; so to Mr. Fowler's Katharine went, and there she could hear nothing, except that Hobbs had been there, and was gone again, because Mr. Fowler was out. He had been out all night, the servant said, but they expected him in every minute. Katharine did not ask where he had been; it was not in her nature to be curious; besides, she was just then occupied with the thought of the picture.

There was nothing to be done then but to go to the Miss

Ronaldson's. This was not quite such a pleasant visit as it used to be. The spirits of the old ladies were not as good as formerly ; they were always lamenting that Charlie and his mother were not settled near them, and there might have been something, too, of reproach in their feeling towards Katharine. They had so settled it in their own minds that she was to be their niece, that her refusal had come upon them as a bitter disappointment. Still they were very good and very charitable, and helped Katharine in all her district matters to the utmost of their power, and liked her to come and gossip with them about the news of the town. It was only when marriage was in question, or when any thing was said about their nephew and his prosperous career, or his health or happiness, that a sigh from Miss Ronaldson, and a little wink and shake of the head from Miss Priscilla, showed that if they had forgiven they had not quite forgotten.

Katharine found them this morning particularly complaining ; Miss Priscilla's rheumatism had kept her awake all night, and her sister was vainly endeavouring to make her wrap herself up in flannel, and was as angry as it was possible for her to be, when she found that Prissy liked better to sit by the fire, moaning in solemn suffering, than to take immediate measures to be cured. "Let Deborah rub your shoulder with opodeldoc, Prissy, my dear, and put this piece of new Welsh flannel across your back," she was saying, just as Katharine came into the room.—"I've told you, sister, it's no good ; it's in the family, and there's nothing to be done. Oh dear !" and a loud moan escaped from Miss Priscilla, as she turned round in her chair to see who had entered. "Oh Katharine, it's you ; how do you do ?—sit down, do. You find us very bad indeed to-day."—"Very bad, indeed," echoed Miss Ronaldson. "We have had a rough night, haven't we, Prissy ?"—Miss Priscilla dolorously shook her head. "A terrible pain is rheumatism, Katharine, a terrible pain. I hope you'll never be troubled with it."—"And Prissy won't try Steers' opodeldoc," said Miss Ronaldson, "though there's nothing like it ; it is not like a quack medicine—it's quite known and recommended ; but she won't try it. I've done all I can to persuade her, I do assure you I have ; but Prissy thinks she knows best."—"What's the good of setting oneself against a family complaint ?" observed Miss Priscilla, sitting upright in her chair, with the most determined martyr-like air. "Sister Rebecca, you had better not trouble Katharine about it ; you'd best leave me to myself. How's your mother to-day, Katharine ? Oh dear !"—"Sha'n't we send for Mr. Fowler, my dear ?" asked Miss Ronaldson, anxiously.—Miss

Priscilla declined with a hasty shake of the head.—“I should have sent for Mr. Fowler in the night, I assure you, Kate,” continued Miss Ronaldson, anxious to assure Katharine that she had not been deficient in any sisterly duty; “but Prissy wouldn’t let me; she hates doctors, Prissy does.”—“Where’s the good of sending for a doctor to cure a family complaint?” asked Miss Priscilla.—“You wouldn’t have had Mr. Fowler if you had sent for him,” said Katharine, wishing to divert the attention of both sisters; “I called there just now, and they told me he had been out all night, but I did not learn where.”—“Didn’t you, now? there’s a pity,” exclaimed Miss Priscilla, in an energetic tone, and quite forgetting her rheumatism.—“A great pity,” repeated Miss Ronaldson; “out all night! then what Deborah said is true.”—“And what did Deborah say?” asked Miss Priscilla quickly; “you never told me.”—“Why, Deborah said, when she came back from market, that she had seen the new assistant standing at the surgery-door, looking out; and she heard him say to some one,—she did not know who,—a bluff man dressed in a brown coat and straw hat; she thinks it might have been Taylor’s brother, at the Black Eagle, for he does wear a brown coat sometimes, and once she saw him in a straw hat—but, dear me! what was I saying? Prissy, my dear, do help me.”—“You were going to tell us what Mr. Fowler’s assistant said, as he stood at the surgery-door,” observed Katharine, stepping in before Miss Priscilla’s rather impatient answer could be ready.—“Oh! yes, so it was; at least—but, you know, my dear Katharine, I like to be exact—I think Deborah told me it was the surgery-door, but I can’t be quite certain; it might have been the house-door, but I think it must have been the surgery-door, don’t you, Prissy, my dear? because, you see, assistants do always stand at surgery-doors.”—“Well!” was all Miss Priscilla’s reply. Miss Ronaldson hurried forward more quickly, but not more intelligibly: “It might have been the surgery-door—and I think—yes, I am quite sure it was now, for Deborah told me she had to get some medicine made up, and she thought of going in there, and asking him to do it for her, and then it was she saw him; yes, it must have been the surgery-door.”—“I dare say it was,” said Katharine good-humouredly, “for I remember remarking him there myself to-day, when I came up the street.”—“Did you, indeed! that was curious, and makes it quite certain. But, anyhow, Deborah brought home the news that Mr. Fowler had been at Maplestead all night; and very sorry I was to hear it.”

“Maplestead!” replied Katharine, in a tone of alarm.—

"Maplestead?" echoed Miss Priscilla, with eager curiosity.— "Ah! yes, Maplestead, surely," replied Miss Ronaldson, her face assuming an expression in which might have been traced grave sympathy and a little mixture of self-importance at being the bearer of such tidings. "Deborah was telling me about it just as some one called her away to the back-door; and then, when I came back, I found you so bad, Prissy, my dear, that it put it out of my head."—"Might we hear a little more from Deborah now?" asked Katharine, trying to control a feeling of overpowering anxiety.—"Surely," said Miss Priscilla, quickly.—"Surely," was echoed by Miss Ronaldson, and the bell was immediately rung. But Deborah could give no satisfactory account. The new assistant had told her that Mr. Fowler had been summoned to Maplestead about half-past eight or nine o'clock the preceding evening, and had not returned. Mrs. Forbes was very ill, but what was the matter was not fully known.—"Well, it's very provoking; but we must be patient," said Miss Priscilla, resignedly; "we shall know all in good time."—"Yes, all in good time," repeated Miss Ronaldson; and Katharine felt more strongly than either, that it must be all in good time, but it was a sore trial to be patient.—She moved to go; but the blank looks of the two old ladies showed her that it would be unkind; they had only seen her once since her father's death, and there was much to be told which was interesting to them, and something to hear which might be interesting to Katharine. A letter had been received from Mrs. Ronaldson that morning; part of which was read aloud with marked emphasis. Mrs. Ronaldson was vexed, she wrote, at the effect of Charlie's visit to Rilworth, he had returned home in such bad spirits. Not that this was exactly to be wondered at, considering all he had had to try him whilst he was there; but he did not seem to rally at all!—"And that's not like a young man of Charlie's age," observed Miss Ronaldson oracularly, as she carefully refolded the letter, replaced it in the envelope, and conveyed it to the depths of a capacious pocket. "He has a very feeling heart; but to go on fretting can't be right."—"Surely not," observed Miss Priscilla, fixing her keen eyes on Katharine's face till she brought the crimson colour to her temples. "There's little good in fretting in this world, is there, Katharine?—oh dear!"—"Let me rub, Prissy," said Miss Ronaldson anxiously, and drawing her chair near to Miss Priscilla.—"No, thank you, sister, no, please not;" and Miss Priscilla extended her hand forbiddingly. "I was going to say about fretting, I don't think it's right in any one, let alone our nephew Charlie,

of something of the same kind; and Mrs. Ashton said
 always had a misgiving that she would not live long. H
 even went on to calculate the chances of Colonel Fo
 again; till Katharine, who had been sitting quite s
 endure it no longer, and hastily exclaimed, "Moth
 run down to Mr. Fowler's; you won't mind." — "H
 to Mr. Fowler's, child! It's too late a good deal." H
 offered to go, but Katharine was determined. She
 much obliged, she said, but nothing would satisfy her
 hearing herself. "I won't be gone five minutes, mo
 she added; "and supper is not quite ready. You k
 You would like to hear how Mrs. Forbes is yourself. And p
 and talk a little," she added in a low voice to Henry Mad
 as he was going into the shop. He was very good-natured,
 had the feeling of old acquaintance and regard for Mrs. Ash
 as he ran down again, and the conversation became interes
 such, and they did not observe how long Katharine had l
 and all Henry Madden recollected an engagement he
 had for that evening, and looking at his watch found it
 to be half past six o'clock. "I am afraid I must go now," he said;
 to learn s and the least notion it was so late. I suppose your daug
 upon the p back in a minute or two." — "Yes, I suppose so. I
 son stopped a must be," replied Mrs. Ashton, in the uncomfort
 Katharine, a person who did not thoroughly believe her own w
 so fast too! I don't used to be out so late. I wonder what has l
 confidential from Maplestead, I am afraid." — "I could
 and inquire, as I go down the street, if
 Madden, feeling his own curiosity not a l
 was to ha over to Maplestead a
 "Thank you, I should be very kind," be
 on sadly if any thin
 are how the feeling has
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 Carter
 any one
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what I hear my sisters say. If you are one of Mr. Reeves' followers, you may be one of Katharine Ashton's, so they declare, but never else."—"I don't know what you mean by Mr. Reeves' followers," observed Mrs. Ashton a little quickly; "it seems to me we ought all to be followers of the clergyman of the parish; but if you mean one of those who help Mr. Reeves, why it's natural enough. If people work together, they must in a way get to know each other, and be friendly; and that, I think, is what has been at the bottom of Kitty's keeping friends with Mrs. Forbes. They always had some business together, and so they have in a measure now. And I don't think you would find any of those who have districts, and go to the schools, and all that sort of thing, call Mrs. Forbes proud; indeed, I have heard many of them say just the contrary."—"Perhaps so," said Mr. Madden, to whom the question was one of profound indifference, except that it was part of his political creed that every person connected with Colonel Forbes must on all occasions be in fault. "But really I mustn't stay any longer. Good evening to you, Mrs. Ashton."—"Good-bye," said Mrs. Ashton, in a sorrowful tone; for her spirits, which had been a little excited by the conversation, began to sink as soon as she thought she was to be left alone. "If you go to Mr. Fowler's, do send Kitty back; she ought not to be out so late."

The injunction was unnecessary, for just at that moment Katharine's knock was heard at the street door. In spite of his haste, Henry Madden could not help delaying a little longer to hear the latest news. He held open the door for Katharine, who did not enter, but, rushing up to her mother, threw herself on her neck, saying, "Oh, mother!"—and, in spite of every effort, her face was choked with sobs;—"she is so ill."—"Never mind, my child, sit down; don't fret, sit down. Just get her a glass of water," added Mrs. Ashton, addressing Mr. Madden, who stood by in quiet astonishment at this sudden burst of feeling.—"No, mother; no, thank you; I don't want any water; I don't want any thing," exclaimed Katharine, commanding herself to be more composed. She became conscious of the presence of a third person; "I don't want to go to bed, but I wanted to say—" She stopped, and her mother made Mr. Madden feel himself in the way; but even so he could not go without satisfying his curiosity. "Mrs. Forbes is worse, I am afraid," he said.—"Yes, that is—no, she is not worse; at least, they think not; but they want—Oh! mother, if I might only go over and nurse her."—"Kitty, my child! why you are quite silly," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, with an

accent of gentle and anxious expostulation. — "They have fine servants enough at Maplestead, I should imagine," observed Mr. Madden, sarcastically, "without requiring any aid from Rilworth." Katharine looked up quickly, and a little angrily: "Mr. Madden, you won't mind, I hope, but I want to speak to my mother very much, and time presses." — "Oh! of course, I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be any interruption," he replied in an offended tone; "I did not in the least know you were such a devoted Forbesite." Katharine would not answer him, but stood up with an air which plainly showed she expected him instantly to go. "Good evening," he said once more, and this time very coldly. Katharine saw she had annoyed him; but she did not think or care about it then, and as soon as the door was closed, she turned again to her mother: "I could not tell you all about it while he was here, mother; but, indeed it is not a fancy. They do want a nurse dreadfully, and Mr. Fowler does not know where to get one, and ——" "But you to go, Kitty, and leave me here all alone, and the packing, and all the business!" Mrs. Ashton was really a kind-hearted person; but it naturally struck her just then that "charity should begin at home." Katharine, however, was not to be daunted. "I thought of all that, mother, dear; and I would not for the world leave you for more than this one night; but it would only be just for to-night, and Betsy Carter would come and sleep here. I went and asked her as I came up street, that was one thing which made me so late. But I will tell you how it is: the London doctor came about seven, and he and Mr. Fowler went over to Maplestead together, and Mr. Fowler wasn't come back when I went there just now; but he did come after a time, and then he told me that he was so pressed for a nurse; for Mrs. Forbes' maid is quite new, and they don't like to trust her, and the housekeeper is ill, and the Colonel seems bent upon having a regular nurse, and Mr. Fowler promised to get one." — "Well, child! well; but you are not a regular nurse," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton. — "No, mother, of course not; but Mr. Fowler can't get the person he thought he could, she is engaged; and there's only Nurse Lawson to be had, and she is deaf, and he was quite in a fuss about it; and then it struck me that perhaps if I could go I might be of use, because you know I am accustomed to illness. I have always been with Selina when she was ill; and I should be so very glad; and Mr. Fowler seemed to think it might do; and then I said I would come back and ask you; and perhaps you would let me go over with him; he is to have a fly ready in half-an-hour." Mrs. Ashton looked doubtful and disconcerted, and

Katharine, reading her thoughts, continued, "I thought of you, mother, directly, and what you would do without me; but I fancied perhaps just for this one night you would not mind so much if Betsy Carter would come over and be here, and I shall be back again quite early to-morrow morning; for, of course, I could not think of staying there. Indeed Dr. Lowe says that he should like to send for a person from one of the London Institutions, so I shall not be wanted. Please, dear mother, let me go." — "But I don't understand; what is the matter with Mrs. Forbes? what has made her so ill of a sudden?" inquired Mrs. Ashton, not able to bring herself as yet to give a direct assent to the request. — "I don't quite know what they call it," replied Katharine; "but it is some internal inflammation, which they say has been coming on some time, and has been made worse by worry and over-exertion. You know, mother, how tired we thought Mrs. Forbes looked yesterday when she called." — "I should have said she had a heart complaint," observed Mrs. Ashton, a little peevishly; "and it's my belief that that is what is the matter with her now." — "There is a tendency to it, they are afraid, though they think there is nothing actually wrong now," said Katharine in a low voice; and turning from the subject as if she did not like even to allow it to herself, she added, "but, mother, what do you say to my going? I told Mr. Fowler I would be back directly and let him know." — "I can't have you running about the streets at this time of night, Kitty," said Mrs. Ashton; "it's not fitting; and why can't you let Colonel Forbes manage his own affairs, he has money enough." — "But money won't buy nurses when there are none to be had," said Katharine, good-humouredly. "However, I won't go, of course, if you don't like it, dear mother; only please may I let Mr. Fowler know, because he's waiting to hear." — "Send Susan," said Mrs. Ashton. — "Susan is younger than I am, and not half so steady," said Katharine, trying very hard not to show how disappointed she felt. "I think, mother, if you don't mind much, I had better take the message myself; it is but a very little way to go." Mrs. Ashton would neither say "yes," nor "no." She sat gazing upon the fire, trying to make up her mind that it was her duty to be hard-hearted. There was a loud ringing at the street-door bell. Mrs. Ashton started: "My patience! what a pull! why the world is bewitched." — "It's Mr. Fowler," said Katharine, looking into the passage; "I thought he was likely to come." He was giving a message to Susan that he was in a great hurry, and hoped Miss Ashton was ready. Mrs. Ashton heard the words. "Ask him to come in, beg him to come in; tell him

I must see him, Susan," she exclaimed, her tone becoming louder and louder. Mr. Fowler appeared, muffled up in a great-coat. He was come, he said to carry off Miss Katharine, and he hoped she would not keep him waiting. — "My mother does not like me to go," said Katharine. — "I don't see the need of it," observed Mrs. Ashton; "when people have got plenty of money they can afford to hire nurses; and I don't know what's the matter with Mrs. Forbes; it may be an infectious fever." — Mr. Fowler smiled with good-humoured contempt: "Pooh! pooh! my dear ma'am; nothing of the kind. It's all perfectly safe, trust me. Come, Kate, I am ready." Katharine looked at her mother beseechingly. "If you had not promised to go, I should have been looking out for some one else, all this time," continued Mr. Fowler, reproachfully; "but you seemed to take it all for granted, and I don't understand being put off in this way at the last moment." — "Only just for this one night, dear mother," said Katharine, as she knelt down by Mrs. Ashton's chair; "and Betsy Carter promised she would be over directly; I expect her every minute." — "You seem to have settled it all wonderfully quick," observed Mrs. Ashton. "It puts me quite in a maze. What time do you say you will be home to-morrow, Kate?" — "I can't say exactly the hour, but the very first minute I can," replied Katharine. — "And you will be so tired all day, you won't be fit for any thing," continued Mrs. Ashton; "and there's the inventory to be made, and the charwoman coming, and John is to send in the cart from Moorlands." — "And I shall be quite ready for it all," said Katharine, trying to laugh away her mother's difficulties. "You will see me back again to-morrow before you and Betsy Carter have had your breakfast; Betsy does not get up very early." — "And then you'll take to your bed all day," persisted Mrs. Ashton. "What do you say, Mr. Fowler?" — "Why, my dear ma'am, I say that it is getting late, and I must be off; and if you can't spare Miss Katharine, I must needs go and look for some one else. One night's sitting up won't kill her. She may go to bed early to-morrow and make up for it." — "Well, then, I suppose it must be," said Mrs. Ashton. It was a very unsatisfactory consent, and Katharine at first scarcely felt herself justified in acting upon it; but when Mrs. Ashton had once yielded, Mr. Fowler urged so strongly the use Katharine might be, and the satisfaction Mrs. Forbes would certainly feel in having a person with her whom she knew and cared for, that Mrs. Ashton's heart was quite softened, and her good-bye was very hearty, and accompanied by the permission not to hurry home too soon the next morning if Katharine felt she could be any real good at Maplestead.

CHAPTER XL.

It was not till Katharine found herself in the fly, driving over to Maplestead, at nearly ten o'clock at night, to intrude herself, as it were, into Colonel Forbes's household, that she fully felt what she was doing, and realised that the step she had taken might be considered a liberty. In her affection for Jane, and her intense anxiety, she had put aside every consideration but that of usefulness, and neither her mother nor Mr. Fowler had suggested any tangible objection to her plan, both taking it for granted that she, who was so intimate with Mrs. Forbes, must be equally welcome to her husband. But Katharine knew well that this was not the case. There are few things we learn more quickly than the fact of not being cordially liked. It is almost an instinct; and Katharine had seen enough of Colonel Forbes to understand the little changes in his manner to different persons. For some reason or other she was sure that neither she nor any of her relations possessed his hearty good-will, and how then would he feel when she presented herself to him, uncalled for, and forced him to be under an obligation to her? The thought made her very uneasy. It was too late to go back, or she might have been tempted to do so; she could only satisfy herself by insisting upon Mr. Fowler's going to Colonel Forbes to sound him as to his possible objections before she saw him. If he put aside the idea of having any one but a regular nurse, or seemed annoyed at the mention of her name, Mr. Fowler was not even to say that she was there, but to allow her to go back to Rilworth in the same fly which had brought them over. The precaution seemed very unnecessary to Mr. Fowler, who had but one idea in his head, that of finding a nurse for the time being; but when Katharine said it must be, he had no reason to object, and the matter being thus settled, both threw themselves back in the carriage, and relapsed into silence during the remainder of their short drive to Maplestead.

"The Colonel will think I have gone off comfortably to bed, and forgotten him;" said Mr. Fowler, taking out his watch, as they stopped at the lodge gate, and making the old woman who opened it hold up her lamp, that he might see the time. "A quarter-past ten, I declare. Any news from the house, granny?" he added, addressing the woman.—"None that I've heard of, sir, except that the great London doctor be come."—"Pshaw! drive on;" and Mr. Fowler put his head out of the window to look at the lights in the

house. It struck Katharine forcibly that he was very anxious, much more anxious than he had said, yet she could not make up her mind to ask him; and he might not have acknowledged it if she had; medical men are always very cautious. He jumped out of the fly as soon as it stopped, and seemed as if he could scarcely wait with ordinary patience till the door was opened. "Has your mistress had any sleep?" was his first question to the footman. "Yes, sir, for more than an hour."—"Good." He went back to Katharine: "You had better come in at once, it will be much the shortest way."—"No, indeed; I assure you I know best; and remember you don't say a word of my being here till you have sounded the matter." It was not the moment to dispute the point, and Mr. Fowler went in. "Won't you get out, ma'am?" said the footman, coming up to the carriage, and supposing that Katharine was the nurse.—"No, thank you, I will wait here for Mr. Fowler. Please shut the door." The man obeyed, thinking it rather odd; and Katharine sat back in the carriage to avoid observation, and listened for sounds in the house—the shutting of doors, the murmur of voices, and especially the return of Mr. Fowler's footsteps. She tried to be patient and to think that it was quite natural he should stay so long, but she could not help feeling uneasy. She had not seriously contemplated the possibility of being obliged to go back, it was only a kind of necessary precaution which made her send Mr. Fowler before her; but now she began to trouble herself with all kinds of fancies, especially the fear that Colonel Forbes would be so seriously annoyed as to put a stop to her seeing any more of Jane for the future. She was inclined to be unreasonable, as anxious people generally are; but she was put out of her suspense at last. Mr. Fowler came back alone. Katharine caught a glimpse of his face by the lamp in the hall; and saw he looked much discomposed. "There, come in," he muttered, in an angry tone, letting down the steps of the fly himself. "See if I put myself out of my way for any one again in a hurry. The Colonel shall hire a nurse himself next time."—"But does he not like my coming? Are you quite sure I ought?" said Katharine, drawing back. Mr. Fowler made no reply, except by holding out his hand to help her out of the carriage. Two footmen were in the hall, who stared at her rather unceremoniously, and did not seem to know at all what they were to do with her. Katharine sat down, whilst Mr. Fowler went up to one of the men, and began talking to him in an under voice. She grew more and more annoyed. Colonel Forbes ought certainly, she felt, to have had the civility to come and speak to her. If it had not been for Jane she

would have been tempted to return even then, but the thought of her overpowered every thing; "Perhaps you will come this way into the housekeeper's room," said one of the servants, speaking civilly, and opening a door for her to pass. Katharine looked entreatingly at Mr. Fowler—she wanted very much to be told what Colonel Forbes had said;—but Mr. Fowler was buttoning up his great-coat, preparatory, as it seemed, to his return to Rilworth. Katharine went back to him, and asked him what she was to do. "What you are told, I suppose," was his reply; "you need not ask me, you are under Dr. Lowe now."—"But won't you stay, won't you introduce me to Dr. Lowe, and just tell him who I am?" said Katharine.—"Not I, trust me; if he takes it all upon himself, he shall have it his own way, I can tell him. Good night. I suppose we shall see you back at Rilworth some time to-morrow?" He hurried from her before she had time to ask another question, and the fly drove off.

Katharine stood for a moment irresolute and confused; but the footman was still holding the door open for her, and there was nothing to be done but to follow where he led the way—to the housekeeper's room. It was empty, but a cheerful, bright fire was blazing in it. "The housekeeper is ill, I am sorry to hear," observed Katharine, thinking it necessary to make some remark to her attendant.—"Yes, Miss, she has kept her bed these three days with a bad cold on the chest." He was going away as Katharine sat down by the fire; but she detained him with another question: "Is Dr. Lowe at liberty? I should very much like to see him."—"I can't say, miss. I will inquire." And Katharine was left alone.

It was a feeling of despair at her uncomfortable position which had made her ask for Dr. Lowe. She was not at all certain what it would be right to say to him when he came. How differently she was treated now to what she would have been if Jane could have had any idea that she was there! Katharine was obliged to remember this, to remind herself that there was no lady at the head of affairs just then, and that men were often awkward and seemingly forgetful without meaning to be so, in order to be in any way patient. She made up her mind at last to be brave—not to care what was said or done to her, but to think only of what she could say and do for other people; and, as a preliminary step, not to be shy with Dr. Lowe, but tell him why she was come, and ask him to make her useful.—A heavy tread along the passage, rather firm and stately too—Katharine hoped that Dr. Lowe would not behave in a cold or abrupt manner, and frighten

her, or she should not be able to explain her meaning. Her heart beat quite fast when the door opened; it stopped for a second from a feeling which was nearly akin to fear, when she saw Colonel Forbes.

His face was grave but not anxious, at least so Katharine interpreted its expression; and he came up to her and shook hands, and said she had taken a great deal of trouble so late at night; but there was an indescribable most painful coldness of manner, which froze every idea that Katharine might previously have possessed. "Mrs. Forbes will be much obliged, I am sure," he added, as if he were making a great effort to be civil. "We hope to-morrow to have a regular nurse; and to-night we could have managed. I really regret that you should have troubled yourself."—"I was told that the housekeeper was ill," said Katharine, in an apologetic tone, "and Mr. Fowler thought the lady's maid inexperienced."—An under smile of satire, and perhaps annoyance, played round Colonel Forbes' mouth: "Mr. Fowler is very good; he makes himself a little too anxious, as country doctors very often do. They have not so much practice as London physicians, and of course do not understand symptoms in the same way. Dr. Lowe assures me that the attack will soon go off, and all we shall require will be care."—"Then perhaps I can be of no use," said Katharine, a little proudly.—"Oh! no, indeed, I could not on any account take upon myself to say that. No doubt, as you are so kindly anxious, Dr. Lowe will find some work for you; unless, which perhaps I should recommend after your drive, you may think it better to have some tea and go to bed. I will give the servants orders to wait upon you. You will excuse my remaining any longer myself. I must go and see whether I am wanted. Good night!" And he shook hands again. Poor Katharine! how heartily she wished herself back again in her own home; and what an earnest resolution she made never again to obtrude her services where she was not perfectly certain they were needed!

But Colonel Forbes was no sooner gone than another visitor appeared in the housekeeper's room, and the current of Katharine's ideas was completely changed. A hasty, determined knock at the door was immediately followed by the entrance of Dr. Lowe, a quick-eyed, quick-mannered, yet cordial and kind-hearted individual, who seemed to understand Katharine and all her concerns by intuition; and assured her twice in one breath that he was very glad she was come, very glad indeed—the case required great care. His good friend Colonel Forbes had been perhaps a

little too much alarmed ; a little—but there must be a great deal of watchfulness still. “And I may sit up to-night then?” said Katharine, much relieved.—“To-night, and to-morrow night, and as many nights as you please, only don’t knock yourself up. There will be work enough for a good while to come,” he added, speaking more to himself. “Now, are you ready?” And before Katharine had time to answer, he led the way upstairs. Katharine expected to find Colonel Forbes in his wife’s room ; but Jane’s only attendant was one of the housemaids. There were signs however, of Colonel Forbes’ having been there ; for an open book and a paper knife were lying in the great arm-chair, and it was to be supposed therefore that he meant to return. Katharine, however, did not think about that ; she had neither eye nor thought for any thing but Jane’s pale, suffering face, of which she caught a glimpse as she entered the room. Dr. Lowe motioned to her to keep at a distance, and then he went up to the bed, and said, “We have brought you an old friend, Mrs. Forbes, I hope you will be glad to see her.” Jane looked up at him with an expression of face which showed that she only half-comprehended his meaning ; but when he added “Miss Ashton,” a gleam of pleasure lightened up her face, and her eye glanced rapidly round the room. Katharine sat down by her, and took off her bonnet, and said she was going to stay ; and Jane seemed satisfied then, and sank back into the same almost torpid state. Yet she was still conscious who was near, for when Katharine moved again, wishing to go into the next room, and receive her instructions for the night from Dr. Lowe, Jane was disturbed, and put out her hand to stop her, and was only quieted by the assurance, twice given, that she would return immediately. The directions were very simple, merely to give medicine at certain hours, and to call Dr. Lowe if the pain returned. There was no fear, it seemed of any thing like immediate danger, though there was a necessity for great care. Dr. Lowe gave all necessary instructions in his own peculiar department ; the housemaid gave all requisite information in every other ; Katharine was provided with wine and biscuits in case of needing them herself, and then both the physician and the servant wished her good night, and left her.

No one said any thing about Colonel Forbes—no one suggested whether he would or would not return. His ways were evidently a mystery not to be inquired into.

Katharine took possession of the seat opposite to the empty arm-chair, which she did not like to occupy, though it had rather a ghastly look, it was so like Colonel Forbes himself ; and if she

had not been expecting him to enter, she would probably have fallen into a reverie. There was some excitement in the novelty of her position, and she was not as anxious as she had thought she should be. Dr. Lowe's manner had inspired her with hope and confidence. She did not think that any thing startling or terrible was going to happen then, and yet she did feel as if in some way she had turned over a new and important page of the volume of her earthly life. Her thoughts wandered back to her first acquaintance with Jane,—the first time that she had ever heard of her. That had been at Miss Richardson's, when a rumour reached the school that a new young lady was coming amongst them. Katharine could remember Jane's introduction: the shy, timid glance—the words spoken so low they could scarcely be heard—the frightened look of appeal to Miss Richardson's protection, when one or two of the elder girls made careless personal observations about her. How little she could have imagined then that the most powerful influence to be exercised over her in life was to proceed from one so shrinking and humble! Yet so it was; Jane's earnestness had awakened Katharine's, and the effects of that awakening were to be felt in life, in death, and beyond death in eternity!

And yet in the eyes of the world there were such barriers between them! That was the greatest wonder of all. Katharine looked at the luxurious chamber in which Jane was lying, and it brought back in strong contrast the absence of riches and refinements in her own home; and she thought of the polished society in which Jane moved, and felt herself admitted more by sufferance than courtesy into the privacy of her family, since Colonel Forbes looked down upon her, and his friends would, for the most part, have thought it beneath them to notice her; and yet she could not but feel that Jane and herself were in heart one. They had been so in childhood, they were so still; how was it?

She took up Jane's Bible, which was lying on the table. It happened to open at St. Paul's epistle to Philemon, and she read it through; not with any particular intention, but because it had first presented itself; yet it had a special meaning to her at that time. Onesimus, she had been told, was a runaway slave, St. Paul was a gentleman by birth and education; yet was Onesimus to be received "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved;" a brother, because born to the same inheritance, and working, though still a servant in the eyes of man, for the same glorious cause. If such was Christianity in its early times, such also must Christianity be still. But the lesson then principally

inculcated by fellowship in suffering must, in a different state of society, be taught by fellowship in work. When Jane Sinclair and Katharine Ashton joined in the same work, they were unconsciously, yet most firmly, cementing the tie which the habits of the world would otherwise, in all probability, have utterly severed. Katharine was willing to work still, either with Jane or for her; they had mutual interests, and it mattered little what form the service assumed, only that it was happiness to her to feel that she could be a comfort to one whom she so truly loved. It was this feeling which gave her self-respect and self-command. Outward deference to those above her in society was accorded by her freely; for, although belonging to things of this world, it was an obligation rendered sacred by the ordering of God's Providence, but it could never cause any sense of humiliation. How could a difference of worldly rank touch one whose aim was a crown in heaven?

Not that Katharine could enjoy this feeling of ease at all times. Worldly people above her in rank often made her uncomfortable. She did not know by what standard they would judge her, and she was afraid, therefore, of jarring upon them, or shocking their prejudices. Whatever she said or did, when with Jane, would she knew be thoroughly understood; but it was not so with Colonel Forbes. It was this doubt which was the great drawback to the satisfaction she might otherwise have felt in being now permitted to be of use to Jane in her illness. Colonel Forbes might, probably he did, think it an intrusion; his manner had certainly been as cold as if she had really taken a great liberty. Katharine could not feel at all happy in her mind when she thought he would return to occupy the great arm-chair; but the minutes wore away, and still he did not appear; and then a new fear took possession of her; that he was annoyed at her being there, and therefore was absent on purpose. This was worse even than the other; and she now expected him as anxiously as before she had dreaded his coming.

Jane was lying very quiet all this time, as Dr. Lowe had said she probably would do, from the effect of opiates; and Katharine, hoping that she might be really sleeping, scarcely dared to move for fear of rousing her. But a sudden opening of the door did what she had been so much striving to prevent. Jane started up and asked in a frightened voice who was there. — Katharine was at her bedside in a moment. "Only Colonel Forbes; he did not know you were asleep." — "Oh!" Jane did not smile, and her head fell back on her pillow. Colonel Forbes went to the fire-

place and made a sign to Katharine that he wished to speak with her. He looked disconcerted with himself, and inquired in a whisper if Mrs. Forbes had been asleep long. "Some time, I hope, sir," replied Katharine; "but I can't quite say. She has not moved till just this minute." She did not mean to reproach him for want of thought; but it seemed that he so understood her words, for he said petulantly, "That noisy door ought to be oiled. I must speak about it to-morrow. You say she has had a quiet sleep."—"She has been lying quiet, sir; I don't know whether she has been asleep."—"Please don't whisper," said Jane, raising her faint voice as loudly as she could. Colonel Forbes turned abruptly away from Katharine and went up to his wife; "My dear, it is impossible not to whisper in a sick room. Let me see how you are, let me feel your pulse." He laid his fingers on her wrist, took out his watch, and, moving the night-lamp, without seeing that the light came full upon Jane's face, counted the pulsations most carefully. A weak pulse, not so quick though, by a good deal. Dr. Lowe says we shall have you better by ten degrees after a night's rest."—"I hope so," said Jane, perhaps a little despondingly.—"You must keep up your spirits, my love; it does not do to look on the dark side of things. Miss Ashton will tell you that." Katharine, pleased at hearing her name mentioned, thought she might draw nearer, and she came rather more within view of Jane. "It is very kind of Katharine, isn't it?" said Jane, trying to move, so that she might see her.—"Very kind indeed, my love. Pray keep still, nothing can be worse for you than moving about. As Miss Ashton is here I don't think I shall sit up, she will be a better nurse than I could be. There is nothing more that I can do for you, is there?"—"Nothing, thank you, dear Philip,—only kiss me." He bent down and kissed her, and Jane kept his hand still in her feeble grasp, and Katharine half heard the words: "You are not angry with me now, Philip?" and being certain that they were not intended for her, moved away. Colonel Forbes' reply was very short. Katharine thought she heard a sigh afterwards. He came up to the fireplace once more, and took up the book and the paper-knife which were lying in the arm-chair. "You have every thing you require, I hope, Miss Ashton? I shall be in the next room if I am wanted. Good night." A polite bow was answered by a curtsy from Katharine. She could scarcely avoid smiling at the hesitation he had about shaking hands with her.

"Don't you think you shall go to sleep again, dear Mrs.

Forbes?" said Katharine, as she drew the curtain, so as again to shade Jane's face from the night-lamp. Jane moved her hand as a sign that Katharine was to come and sit down by her. She did not look at all sleepy, though her eyes were dim, as if tears had lately gathered in them. "It is so kind, Katharine," she said; "and would you come again if I were very ill?"—"Yes, of course, in a moment; at any moment; you might always depend upon me."—"I don't think I am very ill to-night," continued Jane. "I was last night—I may be again." She paused, as if trying to collect her strength for the next words, and then added, "Katharine, if I am not very careful I shall have a heart complaint." She fixed her eyes upon Katharine's anxious face, but there was no change in it, and Katharine only said, "Then we must take the greatest care of you—every one will, you may be sure."—"Philip does not know it," continued Jane in a lighter tone. "Dr. Lowe will tell him before he goes, and I may live many years, and I may not die from that; only——" "One cannot forget such a possibility," said Katharine. Her voice had a choking sound, which Jane noticed. "It is not meant we should forget it," she said, taking Katharine's hand fondly; "not that it really makes any difference, we are all under sentence of death; but I suppose one can't help feeling differently when there is a certain danger. Yet it is not my greatest danger, Katharine," she continued; "I made Dr. Lowe tell me all, for I have long had suspicions. He says I may live to old age if nothing should aggravate the evil at present existing; but I have been out of health generally for a long time, and what would be slight illnesses for others will be great ones for me. It has been so now."—"Colonel Forbes will be so careful of you when he knows the truth," said Katharine, uttering, however, more her wishes than her convictions, "that you will be in less danger, humanly speaking, than you have been."—"Yes." A doubtful "yes," followed by a pause. "But, Katharine, if I were very ill at any time, would you really come to me?" Her voice was pleading in its earnestness, and Katharine replied instantly and eagerly, "From the world's end I would come, if I might." As the words were spoken she felt that the promise was solemn beyond her first thoughts; but Jane's placid grateful "thank you," repaid her, and she had no fear for its performance. "And now you will go to sleep again," said Katharine gently.—"Yes, I will try; please sit by me still. How cool you are!" and Jane laid her burning fingers upon Katharine's hand, and repeated again, "You have promised to come to me?" And then the strength which she

had exerted in talking seemed nearly exhausted, and the old feeling of torpor crept over her, and closing her eyes, she appeared about to fall asleep. Katharine sat in the same position for at least two hours, not venturing to remove her hand from Jane's lest she might disturb her. After that Jane woke up for a little while, and Katharine gave her her medicine, and read some of the Psalms to her; but they did not talk again. And so the weary hours of darkness passed, and the chilling morning light stole in through the chinks of the closed shutters, and by that time Katharine was so exceedingly tired that she could not think of any thing but the comfort of rest, and the difficulty she should find in getting through the business of the coming day, and for a few moments she fell asleep herself. She was roused, however, about five o'clock by Jane's restlessness. The pain in her side had returned again, not as violently as at first, but sufficiently so to be alarming to Katharine. Jane herself too was a little frightened, and begged that the bell might be rung for some one to come and help her; but just as Katharine was going to pull the handle, she stopped her and said, "No, you must not, you will disturb Philip."—"He would rather be disturbed if you are suffering," said Katharine.—"No, no; it must not be;" and Jane's face, even in the midst of her bodily suffering, showed that the pain of her mind was greater.—"But he ought to know, and I am afraid he will be vexed with me if I don't call him," said Katharine. Jane could scarcely speak, the pain was so intense; but she grasped Katharine's arm convulsively, and whispered in an agony of eagerness, "Please not,—Dr. Lowe." Katharine was in great perplexity, for she did not think that Jane, in her present state, ought to be left for a single moment; but there was no alternative, and, hurrying along the passage, she knocked at the door of the apartment which she had been told Dr. Lowe occupied.—His quiet manner reassured her, as it had done before. The return of the pain, he said, was only what was to be expected—there was no reason to call any one—certainly not Colonel Forbes. If Katharine would only attend to his directions nothing else was required; and when Dr. Lowe had given them, and visited Jane for a few minutes, he went back to his bed and Katharine returned to her watch.

Jane talked a little again, as the pain decreased, but it was chiefly upon indifferent subjects. She did not again allude to her illness, and she seemed to have a dread, which to Katharine was unaccountable, of any reference to the removal to Moorlands. It was impossible not to touch upon it every now and then; but

Jane always turned from it, and sometimes so awkwardly as to be abrupt. She liked to hear any thing which Katharine could tell her of the poor people, but the questions she asked the most eagerly were about the Miss Ronaldsons and their nephew; and a look of blank disappointment came over her when she heard Katharine say, in an indifferent tone, that Mr. Ronaldson was gone back to the north, and would probably not be at Rilworth again for a very long time. Katharine did feel particularly indifferent just then, for Jane's illness had put all thought of herself and her own cares out of her mind. Jane was silent for several minutes after receiving the information, and Katharine, supposing she was tired, moved away from the bed, and busied herself with putting the room in order. It was growing so late that she thought it must be nearly time to give up her place of watcher to another, and return herself to Rilworth. Jane looked at her affectionately, when, after a time, she stood again by the bedside; and, noticing her weary face, became anxious that she should have her breakfast and then take some rest. Her own maid could come to her now, she said, and that would be all she should want. Katharine begged to remain a little longer, till she had seen Colonel Forbes; after that she must return home.—“Without rest! Oh, no, Katharine; you will be quite ill. Besides, Colonel Forbes may be late.”—“But he will come to see you the first thing, I suppose?” said Katharine.—“Perhaps so,” was Jane's short reply; and then, apparently fearing that Katharine might think hardly of him, she added, “You know he has so very much to do, he can't command his own time.” It was most strange to Katharine. She imagined that a husband's natural impulse would have been to make his wife the object of his earliest attention. She was quite sure that if it had been the case of her father and mother it would have been so, and the little trait gave a more painful impression of the feeling existing between Colonel Forbes and Jane than any thing she had observed before. “I should not like to go without seeing him,” continued Katharine; “I want to thank him for letting me stay, and I should be glad to know, too, if I could be of any further use.”—“And you won't come back?” said Jane musingly.—“I am afraid I shall not be able,” was Katharine's reply. “My mother wants me at home so much, and you know I must make my duty to her the first object.”—“Yes, certainly, yes,” continued Jane in the same musing tone. “She would miss you exceedingly if you were to go away from her.”—“If I were to go; but there is no chance of that.”—Jane's lips framed a

sentence, which she yet seemed unwilling to utter; but after a long pause, in which she appeared to have been deeply engaged in her own thoughts, she said, "I exacted a selfish promise last night; you might not be able to keep it." — "I might be ill," said Katharine; "I know nothing else which should prevent me." — "You might be married," said Jane; and she coloured far more than Katharine. — "I might be; it is not probable; but, dear Mrs. Forbes, I could not marry any one who would not spare me for such a purpose." — "So you think," said Jane; "but you cannot be sure. How can people know each other before they marry!" — "I could not marry upon a short acquaintance," said Katharine. — "And how will the longest acquaintance help you?" asked Jane. "At least," she added quickly, "if it is knowledge after you are engaged." — "I hope mine would not be that kind of knowledge," observed Katharine; "I quite agree there is but little trust to be placed in it. People deceive themselves partly from vanity, and partly because they are happy, and so they end in deceiving each other; I have seen that." Jane turned away her head and sighed. "But we must not trouble about these far-off improbabilities," said Katharine, more lightly; "there is enough to think of for the present. I would come back to-day if I might, and if I were able, but I must not let my mother be fretted, and perhaps you will have other nurses and better ones. Mr. Fowler said last night that perhaps one of the Miss Forbes would come to you." — "They would if Philip liked it," said Jane; and then she thought a minute, and observed, "They don't come here very often." — "But if they knew you were ill they would come," said Katharine. — "Yes, they are very good; I think they would help me as much as they could, but they have a good deal to do at home." — "I would much rather nurse you entirely myself," said Katharine affectionately; "but Colonel Forbes would not like that. At least," and she blushed a little, "I fancied last night that he did not much approve of having a stranger about." — "He did not say any thing, did he?" asked Jane hurriedly. — "Oh! no; he was very kind; and it might have been only my notion, but I should like to be quite sure he would not disapprove before I offered myself again. However, that is foolish talking," she continued. "Dear Mrs. Forbes, I must really think of going now. If I were to ring would your maid come to you?" — Jane considered again, and having settled that it was now so late there would be no fear of disturbing "Philip," suffered Katharine to ring. They were waiting in silence, and Katharine was thinking in her own mind

that Jane looked more ill by day-light than she had done by candle-light, when a little impatient knock was heard at the door. "That is Philip," said Jane instantly. Katharine went to the door. — Colonel Forbes was in his dressing-gown; a most unfortunate circumstance for his temper, since he was scrupulously particular as to his personal appearance. He drew back directly he saw Katharine. "Miss Ashton! I beg your pardon; I thought you were gone to take some rest." — "I am going home, I believe, sir," said Katharine, holding open the door for him to enter. — He hesitated a moment, and then walked straight up to the bed with a step which showed that he was uncomfortably conscious of wearing slippers. "How are you, my love? I heard your bell, or I should not have come in. What sort of night have you had?" — "Very tolerable," said Jane, cheerfully; "I slept nearly two hours, didn't I, Katharine?" — "Quite two hours," replied Katharine, "and then the pain came on." — "Yes, yes," repeated Colonel Forbes hastily; "yes, we must be prepared for that. It won't do to distress yourself, my dear, because the pain returns. Dr. Lowe told me yesterday it was quite to be expected. It was not as bad, I suppose, as at first." — "Not quite," said Jane, wishing to speak the truth, and yet anxious to say what she knew he would wish to hear. He had a particular dislike to be told of any person being in pain. — "And we shall get you up, I hope, by and by," he continued. "Oh! no," exclaimed Katharine, entirely forgetting to whom she was speaking, but recollecting it directly afterwards, and becoming extremely confused. — Colonel Forbes just looked at her, and then repeated, "We shall get you up by and by, my love; it will be better for you;—lying in bed is extremely weakening." — "I dare say Dr. Lowe will leave full directions," said Jane; "I suppose he will go back to-day." — "Yes, there can be no reason for his staying now that you are so much better. Fowler will be able to manage for you, only we must not let him croak as he does." Jane did not answer, but leant her head back, and her face changed, so that Katharine saw she was not by any means free from pain. Colonel Forbes, however, did not perceive it, and aware that he had been uncourteous to Katharine, he turned to her and said a few civil words about the obligation they were under for the exertion she had made, taking care, however, to add that he hoped it would not be required of any one again. Mrs. Forbes being so much better already, it was to be expected she would improve rapidly. Katharine could not even venture to say that she hoped he would call upon her for her services another time, if necessary. She was sure

that he would not do so if he could possibly avoid it, and her only reply was a request that, if it were not very inconvenient, she might be allowed to go back to Rilworth in the cart, as she felt herself rather too tired for the walk. "Oh! certainly." Nothing could be more hearty than Colonel Forbes's acquiescence; his face quite brightened at the idea, and he assured her that he would give orders for it directly. All he begged was, that she would take some breakfast first; she would find some ready for her in the housekeeper's room. Katharine was as grateful as it was necessary to be—that is, she returned him precisely the civility he gave; and Colonel Forbes, kissing Jane's forehead, and telling her to keep up her spirits, and eat and drink as much as she could, retired, under the protection of the curtain, with as little of the undignified shuffle of slippers as possible.

When he was gone Katharine prepared to go too; but more unwillingly than she would have done before. In some way or other Colonel Forbes always contrived to leave on Jane's mind traces of his visits—not "angels' visits," though "few and far between." Katharine could not exactly tell the reason why, but she could guess something, and feel a great deal more. Persons who present the repelling pole of the moral magnet always do make their presence felt, even to bystanders. Jane now was not at all like what she had been a few minutes before. It seemed as if her husband possessed the power of shutting up her feelings, or at least their expression, even towards others. She said nothing of Katharine's coming back, and did not even express a wish to see her again, till just as Katharine was upon the very point of leaving her, and was putting her pillow comfortable, and smoothing the coverlet, and reminding the maid, who was present, of all the minute directions which Dr. Lowe had given. Then Jane seized one of Katharine's hands in both hers, and with all her little strength forcing her to bend down to her, said, "When I am very ill, you have promised." "Yes, I have promised, and, with God's help, I will keep the promise;" and Katharine departed.

Katharine's breakfast in the housekeeper's room was very comfortable, for Colonel Forbes' order had been strict that every attention should be paid her. He would have done the same if she had been actually a deadly enemy; it was part of his pride that no one in his house should be neglected. So Katharine sat down by a bright fire, and was served with coffee, and Westphalia ham, and hot rolls, which she was too tired and feverish to like, but which she ate, because it was necessary to keep up her strength for the day's work. From time to time the handle of the door was turned noiselessly, and a solemn man-servant ap-

peared, to inquire if she had every thing she wanted, and, putting fresh coals on the fire, withdrew, equally solemnly. Quietness was the characteristic of the house. Stealthy steps moved along the passage, and brooms and dustpans did their duty with faint sounds in the distance, and the great clock in the servant's hall ticked sepulchrally, as if afflicted with a cold in the chest. So soothing it all was, that Katharine's almost irresistible impulse was to fall back in the chair, and make up the arrears of sleep; but there was business awaiting her, the packing to be begun, and the charwoman to be directed; so she set herself to resist the temptation, and even walked up and down the room at intervals to prevent herself from yielding to it, trying to settle in her own mind what she would do first when she reached home.

But home seemed far off just at that moment; her thoughts would wander back continually to Jane's room, and what she had said, and the promise which had been given. The web of human existence is strangely intermingled. Katharine's life had, in some way, been blended with Jane's for several years, and now it seemed as if circumstances might unite them yet more closely. It was not Katharine's reason which told her this, but her affection and sympathy. She had such a strong sense of Jane's loneliness, in spite of the presence of husband, children, and friends; and the words, "When I am very ill you will come to me," rang touchingly and mournfully in her ears, and seemed to constitute her in a manner Jane's special guardian and watchful friend. Yet Katharine did not think that "very ill" was likely to come soon. She would not allow herself to think that when Colonel Forbes knew the state of his wife's health, he would ever again expose her to the risk of over-exertion, and so she comforted herself for the moment; and feeling at last that interest for Jane was superseding the more imperative demands of her home duties, resolved, by a vigorous effort, to put aside all lingering remembrances of the past or guesses about the future, and think only of the present; a resolution much assisted by the announcement of the solemn footman that the cart was ready.

CHAPTER XLI.

KATHARINE found a tolerably comfortable state of affairs on her return home. Betsy Carter, who always appeared to particular advantage when left to be useful in her own way, had managed to be a tolerable substitute for Katharine; and Mrs. Ashton had

eaten a good breakfast, and was just preparing to make an onset on the business of the day at half a dozen different points, when her daughter made her appearance.

"What ! so early, Kitty, my dear ; I didn't expect you for the next hour at least. It is good of you, I must say. Sit down and tell us all about it, and have some breakfast. Betsy will get you some, won't you Betsy ?" Miss Carter was quite pleased to be recognised in her responsible position as the manager of the establishment, and would instantly have ordered a sumptuous repast but for Katharine's hearty "No, thank you ; please not, Betsy. Mother, dear, I have had my breakfast, and I couldn't possibly eat any thing more ; but just tell me how you are, and how you have been getting on."—"Well, pretty fair, for the matter of that ; Betsy has been very kind. We were not quite so early as usual, for we had rather a bad night at first, in the sleeping way, not being so well used to each other ; so we made up for it this morning, and Betsy has been as busy as a bee, and has set Susan and Mrs. Crossin to work, packing up the house-linen. But I am glad you are come, Kitty ; we don't do half as well without you ; and you have not told us yet about Mrs. Forbes, though I knew by your face when you came in that she couldn't be worse."—"She is better a good deal, I hope," replied Katharine ; "but I am very glad I went. I think I was of use ; and she liked to have me."—"Well ! that was good. I hope she understood that I wouldn't have spared you for every one ; and the Colonel was civil, was he ?"—"Yes," said Katharine ; "he could not very well be uncivil." Betsy Carter laughed to herself, but said nothing. "And they gave you every thing you wanted, I suppose ?" said Mrs. Ashton ; "a good fire, and plenty to eat and drink ?"—"Of course," interrupted Miss Carter ; "it's not the Maplestead fashion to let any one starve. You should hear the stories I hear sometimes from the housekeeper, about the way things go on in the kitchen."—"Well ! it's all right that it should be so in a large house," observed Mrs. Ashton ; "but what is the matter with Mrs. Forbes, Kitty ?"—"I don't quite know what they call it, mother ; and it does not so much signify as she is better." Katharine had an instinctive dislike to hearing Maplestead discussed by persons who did not understand Jane, and especially she dreaded Betsy Carter's gossip ; so, after warming herself for a few minutes, and answering her mother's anxious questions as to how she felt, and assuring her that she was not ill from fatigue, she said she would go up stairs and take off her things, and see what Susan and Mrs. Crossin were about.

Home looked homely to Katharine; but it was very comfortable and free, and it was a sad thought that it must soon be given up. She had no fear of being misunderstood by her mother; but she could not be equally sure with Selina, and it would be a trial to beliving in another person's house, even though he were her own brother, after she had so long been accustomed to consider herself joint-mistress with her mother. And every thing now was reminding her that change was at hand;—the closets in her own room were empty, and the floor was strewn with the various articles which had once occupied their shelves. This was a fancy of Miss Carter's; she liked, she said, to see what there was put away, and then it was easy to judge what was to be done with it; and for the last hour Susan and Mrs. Crossin had been busy unloading shelves in the different closets, till the whole of the upper chambers, except Mrs. Ashton's bed-room, looked like a great lumber-room. Katharine wished very much that the work had been delayed till her return, and thought that it would be much easier to manage with only her mother to help her, and without the risk of Betsy Carter's suggestions. But Betsy liked a bustle, and was fully convinced in her own mind that neither Mrs. Ashton nor Katharine knew half as well as she did "what ought to be done with what;" so she at once announced her intention of staying to help them, and Katharine had no alternative but resignation, and as much gratitude as she could summon up for the occasion.

And very busily they worked; Katharine trying to forget that she was dreadfully tired, and had sat up all night, and sometimes actually succeeding to a certain extent. After dinner, however, she looked so entirely fagged, that Mrs. Ashton insisted upon her lying down for an hour, and Katharine accordingly retired to her now comfortless apartment to rest, and, if possible, sleep, in spite of the knocking of hammers, the moving of tables and boxes, and the orders given in Miss Carter's loudest tones. She slept for two hours, and was awakened by voices in the parlour below. John's voice was one; Henry Madden's another. It was necessary, therefore, to go down and talk over business;—the amount of yearly income to be received from the shop had never been settled yet, though it had been talked about in general terms. Katharine felt that neither her mother nor her brother had good heads for business, and she did not place very much confidence in her own, and a sigh escaped her as she thought of the way in which hitherto they had been saved from all trouble of the kind, followed by a longing, checked as soon as it arose,

that Charles Ronaldson would settle near them to help them in their difficulties.

Betsy Carter was to go home to drink tea, so that Katharine knew they should have the evening to themselves. She dreaded it rather; business matters were always likely to bring thoughtless words and misunderstandings, and John's temper was hasty, and Henry Madden was inclined to be self-willed and imperious. There was no one to put them down or direct them in any way. Mrs. Ashton never contradicted John, and Katharine herself had no authority. Again came the sorrowful longing for her father, and again Katharine felt herself discontented and distrustful, till she remembered the fowls of the air fed without thought for themselves, and the hairs of her head which were all numbered; and a better, a dearer Love brought back the quiet confidence which was now habitual to her.

Business began at once, for John was in a hurry, and indeed never could bear delays of any kind. His character showed itself painfully to Katharine as the conversation proceeded. His calculations were continually made upon the supposition that probabilities were certainties, and this, of course, greatly misled him. Henry Madden, on the contrary, would reckon upon nothing which was not actually in his possession at the present, or at least assured to him by constant experience of the past. It was very difficult to make two such minds meet, and, as the evening wore on, Katharine became almost hopeless. She felt also that she distrusted Henry Madden in his way quite as much as she did her brother. He was a selfish person; and where his interest was concerned it was almost impossible to make him see things fairly. Then again he was a politician, and not a very reasonable or judicious one; and this to Katharine was one of the most objectionable points about him. It might do him so much harm in his business, and if it did, and they were dependent upon him, they must, of course, suffer. Again she pondered the desirableness of parting with every thing at once; and again she was met by the thought of John's extravagance, and her mother's weak fondness, which would infallibly cause all that they possessed to be made over to him if it were possible to grasp it. She sat by, for the most part, silent, or, if she did speak, it was generally to put in some conciliatory word, or to soften any thing which might be said that was likely to be painful to her mother's feelings. And there was a great deal of this kind; perhaps it was impossible to help it, but it did seem strange to Katharine to hear Henry Madden speaking of her father, criticising what he

had done, and referring to what he had said, without any apparent remembrance of her mother's presence; and several times in the course of the evening Katharine drew near to her mother, under pretence of arranging her work, and fondly pressed her hand, and kissed her, because she saw the tears stealing down Mrs. Ashton's cheeks, in consequence of some thoughtless speech which Mr. Madden had no idea could give pain, and which John did not notice.

There was an end to that trial, however, as there is to every thing earthly;—a truism which, obvious though it is, we are all in our impatience liable to forget. By ten o'clock the business had advanced as far as the conviction on both sides that agreement was impossible, and that a third person must be called in; and with this satisfactory announcement the party separated. Poor Katharine! how worn and heartsick she felt when she went to bed! and how wrong it seemed to be absorbed, as she felt herself, in matters which after all were only of this world! Whether she and her mother were to have twenty or thirty pounds a year more or less was not of such vast importance, for at all events they would have enough to live upon comfortably; yet she was as eager about it, and as much annoyed in her heart, as John, when Mr. Madden disputed the point.

Katharine did not understand her own character. A love of justice was a very prominent trait. She could give away hundreds, but she could not bear to be unjustly deprived of a penny—and this led her sometimes to be hard in her judgment, and severe in her censures. She saw the effect of her natural disposition, but she did not know the cause; happily for her, indeed, for it saved her from the temptation of making excuses for herself. It was not pleasant to go to bed with the consciousness of having been so hasty and unkind in feeling, if not in words and deeds, but it was safer to be humble than to give way to a spirit of self-justification.

CHAPTER XLII.

AND that evening was but the first of many such evenings. The whole day, indeed, had been but a sample of what Katharine was to bear for the next ten days; only each hour's annoyance aggravated by the near approach of the time when she was to leave the

home of her childhood for ever. Yet she had many things to support her: constant occupation, the knowledge that she was essential to her mother's happiness, and likely to be materially useful to her brother, and especially the sympathy of true friends, whose affection had been gained in happier days, and who now came forward in the hour of sorrow to soothe and comfort her. Mr. and Mrs. Reeves were foremost amongst this number. It almost seemed to Katharine as if they had given up every other claim upon their time in order to attend especially to her. Mr. Reeves was always at leisure now, when Katharine wanted him, and gave her not only comfort but a good deal of straightforward advice in matters not at first sight in his peculiar province. His good common sense made him a most valuable counsellor in a worldly sense, and his deep religious feelings enabled him to put just the tone and spirit into Katharine's way of viewing her troubles which raised them from petty annoyances into crosses to be borne meekly and thankfully for the sake of Him who appointed them.

"Don't try," he said to her one day, "to keep yourself up by secondary motives. They are very useful before people are thoroughly imbued with a religious spirit, but they are merely a loss afterwards. Persons sometimes, for instance, refrain from hasty words, because, as the saying is, 'they only make matters worse.' Very well that is, as far as it goes: it is better to refrain for that reason than not at all; but a man is not therefore a better Christian. Every trouble, great or small, which meets us in life, is meant to be a step to raise us to Heaven. Some persons take advantage of these steps, others pass them by; and so it is that we see some make so much more rapid progress than others." Katharine had long acted upon the same idea to a certain extent; but it became at this period of her life a more firmly established principle, and often gave her the same kind of healthy energy which a child feels when its lessons increase in difficulty. Mrs. Reeves also assisted her in various ways in which only a woman could help her. She had a quick perception, and great tact, and saw, almost before Katharine had entered into an explanation, what were likely to be her trials at Moorlands; and she could understand what no one else exactly did, all the privations which Katharine would have to bear in the loss of the society which of late years had been so pleasant to her. There were moments when Katharine was inclined to regret that she had ever known it; it seemed, she said, as if she had ventured beyond her sphere, and now she was to suffer for it. But Mrs. Reeves would not allow her to say this. "There can be no venturing beyond your sphere,

Katharine," she said, "as long as you keep to the duties of your sphere; and I am sure you always do that. I do very earnestly trust that you will never sink yourself to the level of the ordinary persons you may be obliged to associate with. The good you may do by showing them that you can cultivate your mind, and enjoy reading and conversation, and be brought into association with persons above you in rank, and yet have sufficient self-respect to keep the worldly position in which you were born, will be incalculable." Katharine thought for a moment, and then said, "But, dear Mrs. Reeves, even if I succeed myself in doing this, which I am sure, however, I do not as I ought, I can never influence others; there is nothing so difficult, and perhaps I see more of the case than you do. Persons are constantly imagining, that because I know you, and go over to Maplestead to see Mrs. Forbes, therefore I am quite on a footing with you, and they even try to make me angry sometimes, because I am not asked to parties. But I can't be angry," she added simply, "because I never expect it, and I should not like it."—"I don't think you would like it, Katharine," replied Mrs. Reeves, "any more than I should like to be invited to Rilworth Castle, when the Duchess of Lowther has a party of fashionable London ladies to visit her. There is a sense of unfitness in such associations."—"And yet," said Katharine musingly, "I don't exactly know what answer to give when persons talk to me in this way. I feel I am satisfied, but I don't know why. And as to your visiting at Rilworth Castle, I am sure you must be fit company for any person. It is all very puzzling."—"And so I hope I am fit company for any one," said Mrs. Reeves, smiling; "and so I think you are, Katharine. But it does not follow that we are therefore to wish to overthrow the forms of society. I think, Katharine," she added, "that your friends would be more satisfied as to your position, if they would remember that the same distinctions exist in every rank of English society, and that well-bred people are quite contented they should remain. I will speak of myself, as you first spoke of me. I really believe that, as regards education, I am just as well educated as the Duchess of Lowther—perhaps better in some respects; and, if I were to meet her, I could be as easy in her society as I am in yours. We do meet occasionally; and then we are cordial and free as you and I might be. But she is still the Duchess of Lowther, and I am the wife of a private gentleman,—I put aside his being a clergyman,—and neither education, nor Christian principles, require us to overlook those worldly distinctions. The Duchess, therefore, very properly keeps to her own set of intimate friends, and I keep to

mine. We often meet, indeed, on neutral ground which is common to us both, and the Duchess never fails to show Mr. Reeves the respect due to his office ; but when worldly things are in question, such as grand dinner parties, and other forms of society, we mutually agree to be governed by worldly rules."

"But what people say to me sometimes," said Katharine, "is, that education makes all the difference, and that if persons are well educated they are equal to the Queen, or any one. I don't mean that that applies to me," she added, blushing, "because I have not been well educated."—"I think I see where the difficulty lies," replied Mrs. Reeves ; "highly educated persons in the professional classes meet with society among themselves to satisfy them. Clergymen's families associate with clergymen's families, for instance, and find themselves very pleasant companions, and so they are not tempted to wish for any thing beyond ; but this is not the case with the generality of persons in trade, in this generation at least ; perhaps things may be different in the next. In former days education was but little thought of amongst them, and so parents who were ignorant allowed their children to be ignorant also ; and now, when young people begin to read and think, they do not find sympathy and companionship in their own set, and then they seek it in those above them."—"And find it," said Katharine, gratefully ; "at least if they are like me."—"But all are not like you, Katharine," replied Mrs. Reeves ; "a great many have their heads turned at the same time that they have them filled, and so they think that because they are equal in one point they are equal in all ; which is just as if, because I can play and sing, like the Duchess of Lowther, therefore I must be a duchess myself." Katharine still looked thoughtful, and a little perplexed. "It is a difficult subject, I confess," continued Mrs. Reeves, "more difficult in theory though than in practice, as you have found it ; but the only way of obviating the difficulty, I suspect, is not to elevate a few individuals above their station, but to raise the tone of the whole ; in fact, Katharine, to make a great many others work and study as you have done, and then they will be happy companions for each other, and will not wish to go out of their sphere, because they will have all they want in it."—"It will be a wonderful kind of education which can do that," said Katharine, thinking as she spoke especially of Betsy Carter, and the efforts she had often seen her make to put herself into society beyond her position by birth. — "Many persons would think I was very bigoted and prejudiced, if I were to say that only a Church education will do it thoroughly," replied Mrs. Reeves.

"but I do think so; and I think too that one great reason, if not the chief reason, why schemes of education for the poor, or for those above them, have done more harm than good, is, that they have not been based upon the principles of the Church. Mr. Reeves once made me study the Bible, and Church history, in reference to this subject. I remember his pointing out particularly how every one in every class was kept in his proper place; kings, for instance, having authority, and subjects being bound to obey them; and masters and servants, fathers and children, all ordered to rule or be ruled; and yet again and again, all spoken of as one, — one Body, one Building, — because they were all members of the Church, and had the same privileges, and worked for the same object." — "Yes," said Katharine, thoughtfully, "working for the Church, — that is what has helped me many times when I have been inclined to be discontented; the feeling that in my place I was as necessary to the work of the Church as any great person ever so clever might be. Mr. Reeves put the thought into my head years ago; he did not know how useful it would be." — "And that not one can be spared," continued Mrs. Reeves; "that is a comfort when one thinks oneself very insignificant." — "Yes," replied Katharine, "after all one's boasting about not caring to be thought of consequence, one does care very much." — "Perhaps," replied Mrs. Reeves, "it was intended that we should care. All those longings for advancement, which are a part of our nature, must be meant to be satisfied in some way. It may be the fault is that people strive to raise themselves in this world, instead of in the next." — Katharine was still thoughtful. "I am not," she said, "discontented with my own position; I do not really wish to change it, and I have not the least wish to be introduced into fashionable society. But if I were, what I am not, highly educated, I should think it very hard to be shut out from the acquaintance of nice good people, merely because I was a tradesman's daughter." Mrs. Reeves smiled. — "You would not be shut out, Katharine, if all were like you; that is, not more than I am, as I said before, from the society of persons of high rank." — "But do you think," said Katharine, "that such distinctions of mere rank are right?" — "Yes, most unquestionably," replied Mrs. Reeves, "for the simple reason, that they are fully recognised in the Bible. It is possible," she continued, "that in the course of years education and good manners may have spread through all ranks; yet we have no reason to believe; even then, that all will be outwardly equal." — "It will take a very long time," said Katharine, "to make such

a change as that." — "Not, perhaps, so long as we may think," replied Mrs. Reeves; "refinement spreads very rapidly, as we see by past experience. Old books which describe the manners of clergymen's families, and lawyers', and physicians', show us how very strange, and what we should now call vulgar, they were; and so before them we hear of lords and ladies doing what would shock us. There will be the same change probably in years to come." — "But we may not live to see it," observed Katharine. — "We may see a good deal of it, if God should spare our lives to old age," replied Mrs. Reeves. "We see the commencement now; only, unfortunately, in many cases the improvement begins at the wrong end, — accomplishments, which ought to be the finish, are made the foundation; and, as a natural consequence, the persons who devote their time and thoughts only to such things are just as vulgar as they were before, their minds are not cultivated, and they have no idea of real good-breeding." — "Perhaps so," replied Katharine, with an air of thought; "but how can it be otherwise?" — "Only by a certain number of persons setting a different example," replied Mrs. Reeves. "You, for instance, may do, and have done a great deal." — Katharine quite started with surprise. — "Yes," continued Mrs. Reeves, "I can see it, though, naturally enough, you do not. Miss Carter, for instance, is very much less pushing and disagreeable than she used to be; and I am sure you have taught her; and now she is bringing up her little sister to be quiet and retiring, and is educating her well and sensibly at the same time. Just imagine if this were the case in Rilworth universally, what a change there would be in the society!" — "It would be intolerable!" exclaimed Katharine; "they never would content themselves with remaining in their own position." — "I beg your pardon, Katharine; if they were educated as I mean, they would be perfectly contented; just as contented (to return to the old simile) as I am when I have to visit Mrs. Lane instead of going over to Rilworth Castle. Remember, I am imagining the case of well-bred persons, and the very essence of good-breeding is to keep in your own position."

There was a silence of a few moments. Katharine broke it by saying, "Still the old question recurs, if people are all to be well-bred and well-educated, why are there distinctions?" — "And I must repeat again, because God has appointed them," replied Mrs. Reeves, gravely. "I do not mean," she added, "that when all classes are equal in education, the distinctions will exist to the same degree; of course they will not; but I am sure we shall find

that if they are quite set aside, the result will be not that all persons will be equally refined, but all equally vulgar."—"I don't see why," replied Katharine.—"Is it not," asked Mrs. Reeves, "because of one of the distinctive characteristics of Christian good-breeding is overlooked—that of giving honour where honour is due? The Church teaches that lesson," she added, "just as strongly as it does that we are all one."

The conversation ended here, for it was Katharine's dinner hour; and perhaps it was fortunate for her that it did. Although much more satisfied, she might only have been perplexed by further conversation upon a subject which involved such frequent reference to herself. She was quicker in her perceptions of how she ought to act than she was in her powers of thought. Simplicity and humility had refined her taste and given her great delicacy of feeling; but she was not used to self-contemplation, except in the form of examination as to her faults, and did not always understand herself. Probably the very fact of seeking to know more of her own mind would have destroyed the charm of her character.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TEN days passed away rapidly; yet in looking back upon them they seemed a month, so much had been done in them. Katharine was too busy to go again to Maplestead, but she heard daily reports from Mr. Fowler, and upon the whole they were satisfactory. Jane's amendment was rapid—that is to say for the first few days; afterwards Mr. Fowler said she was languid, and did not gain strength as she ought. There was always something doubtful in his way of speaking of her thorough recovery; and if Katharine had not known the hidden mischief which might at any moment burst forth, she might have thought him what Colonel Forbes had called him—"a croaker." He might indeed have been influenced, in his opinion, by a feeling of pique. Since Dr. Lowe had been called in, he had been only allowed to act under his orders; but the little details which he gave convinced Katharine that the evil was only lulled for the time.

The last day at home arrived, and would have been very overpowering, if Katharine had had time to think; but, happily for her mind though not for her body, she was not allowed one mo-

ment of rest. The necessary good-byes had been said before. Those to the poor people were the hardest of all to bear, for Katharine would not delude them by the hope of assistance which she knew that most probably she should be unable to give. The district would be left without a visitor for the present. Mr. Reeves had announced the need there would be for help, but no one had come forward to offer it. When Katharine thought over her acquaintances, to see who could be asked to supply her place, she could not fix upon a single individual who had apparently leisure to take it. Rilworth was a very busy place, and there were few persons living there who were not engaged in some profession or trade, or had not some pressing family occupation. And when every hour in the day had its claim of duty already, how could more be undertaken?—Mr. and Mrs. Reeves came to see Katharine and her mother the last evening, and Katharine managed to have a little conversation with them alone. The subject of the district was mentioned, and she spoke almost despairingly about it, and as a last resource offered still to continue to be a visitor herself; but this Mr. Reeves would not hear of. "She was going," he said, "into a sphere of new duties, and it would not do to burden her with old ones; besides," he added, "we never materially benefit the world by taking upon ourselves the business which ought to fall to the share of others. Rilworth people are busy, I own; but they are not too busy to eat, and drink, and sleep, and pay visits, and enjoy holidays: and though I give them credit for being very industrious, I really cannot believe they are such admirable managers of their time already, as not to admit of any change by which they shall have leisure for the poor. It is the will which is wanting. Tell them that they are to gain a hundred pounds, or fifty, or thirty, or even ten pounds, by giving up two or three hours in the week to being district visitors, and you would be overrun with applications. No, let the district go on as it can for the present. Mrs. Reeves and myself will take care that there shall be no great distress, and in the meantime I shall hold it up as a disgrace to the town. The young men—those are the persons I want to get hold of. Give me half a dozen Charles Ronaldsons and I would consent to part with half our police, if not the whole. And I do not despair," he added. "We are attaching some to the Church in various ways; by lending them books, for instance, and making them join the Church singing class, and things of that kind, and by degrees one may hope to enlarge their notions of duty."

"I am not sure they will thank you, sir," replied Katharine,

smiling. "I know myself that I always have a feeling, when I see you, that you are going to open my eyes to something I have neglected."—"But you would not like to have your eyes closed again, Katharine?" said Mrs. Reeves, kindly.—"Perhaps not," replied Katharine; "but it gives one a perpetual sense of shortcoming, and when one thinks one has done all there is still a mist of unfulfilled duties behind."—"To make us feel that we are unprofitable servants," said Mr. Reeves. "So it must be always. They who do the most alone know how much is left undone."—"Yet I can so well enter," said Katharine, "into the feelings of a friend of mine, who was obliged to lie down for years, and said it was such a comfort to have all responsibility taken away, and to feel that she could do nothing but be resigned."—"That must have been a very active person in years before," observed Mr. Reeves. "There is no pleasure, but rather exceeding bitterness in feeling helpless for the present, and useless for the past. However, the time must come for you, and for me, and for all, when our only responsibility will be resignation."—"Yes," said Katharine, "it is that thought which often keeps me up now. There is one verse which sometimes quite haunts me: 'Be not weary in well doing.'"—"For in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not," added Mr. Reeves solemnly; and then in a lighter tone he added, "And now you must tell me a little more in detail what your well doing at Moorlands is to be."—"Keeping the children in order principally, I suppose," said Katharine. "My mother will overlook the farmhouse work, and I rather hope she may like it."—"But don't make yourself too useful," said Mr. Reeves seriously, yet with a lurking smile about his mouth. "Remember, you won't do your sister-in-law any real good by teaching her to depend upon you when she ought to depend upon herself."—"That is a gentleman's way of looking at the case," observed Mrs. Reeves playfully. "They know nothing about the working of household matters; do they, Katharine? Because they are accustomed to sit by the fire and be waited on, they think it quite easy to see every thing about one uncomfortable and yet not to move because it is not one's place."—"No," continued Mr. Reeves, "I do not think it easy—I know indeed nothing is more difficult; but I am quite in earnest in what I say: Katharine will do ten times the good by making Mrs. John Ashton work that she will by working herself."—"I shall sit still till it comes to a question of work or ruin," said Katharine gravely, "then I must work."—"It will never come to that, I trust and hope," said Mrs. Reeves.—Katharine repressed a sigh, and answered quietly, "I do not let my-

self look forward.”—“But—I may ask you the question, I hope, without being thought impertinent,”—said Mr. Reeves; “your income is not dependent upon your brother?”—“No,” replied Katharine; “but an only brother! how could one let him suffer?”—“And an only sister!” said Mr. Reeves rather quickly, “how could he let you suffer?”—“That will not be the question,” answered Katharine, “and I should not wish it to be. My mother’s feeling for John is so very strong.”—“So it may be,” continued Mr. Reeves; “but it will surely never be indulged to your injury!”—“Never intentionally,” replied Katharine; “but if you please, sir, I would rather not talk about that now; it can do no good, and for the present we are very comfortably off. Mr. Lane helped to settle our affairs. My mother is to have a hundred and twenty pounds a year during her life from the shop, and I am to have fifty pounds a year for five years afterwards; and there will be the interest of fifteen hundred pounds which my father had in the funds, and some old debts besides.”—Mr. Reeves considered for a few minutes, and then said: “And you are quite sure you are safe in depending upon young Madden’s making the shop answer?”—“I trust to others,” was Katharine’s reply.—“But you are doubtful yourself?”—“I am not quite satisfied, sir; but it is only a little misgiving, and I feel I ought to trust to those who are so much more experienced in business than I am. There will be more chance of my mother’s being comfortable in that way during her life, and it will be much less troublesome to her. Perhaps,” she added, “you will laugh at my chief fidget, but I cannot help wishing that Henry Madden was not such a politician.”—“So do I too, Katharine,” exclaimed Mrs. Reeves, eagerly, “for his own sake, and that of his customers. I know one or two persons who say that if he goes on in the way he has done, abusing people who differ from him, they shall certainly think it their duty to leave him.” “He thinks,” said Katharine, “that his own party will uphold him, but I would not trust to that.”—“No,” observed Mr. Reeves; “it is one thing to uphold a man in words, and another to support him in deeds. He will find the difference by-and-by.” Katharine looked grave, and Mrs. Reeves, fancying they had made her anxious, said kindly, “But we need not foretell evil, Katharine, and the business is too well established to be easily shaken; there is not another good bookseller’s shop in the town.”—“Nor any equal to it in any other town within a distance of thirty miles,” observed Mr. Reeves.—“Young Madden is a fortunate fellow if he will only know how to profit by his advantages.”—“Yes, if,” repeated Katharine rather sadly.

—“That is the great question of success in life, is it not, Katharine?” observed Mrs. Reeves. “We all, I suppose, have advantages, more or less, only some use and some waste them.” Katharine thought of her brother John, and assented most heartily. Mr. Reeves rose to go, and Katharine went to fetch her mother to say “good bye.” It was a very sad moment for poor Mrs. Ashton; she had kept up astonishingly whilst there was any thing to be done or settled; but it was all arranged now, and she had leisure to look at the desolate rooms, stripped of all the lesser articles of furniture which had peculiarly given them the air of home, and to remember that the outward change was but the type of the far more dreary void which was left in her own heart. She almost repented having agreed to move to Moorlands. Any place in Rilworth would, she now fancied, have been preferable; and Katharine was obliged to warn Mr. and Mrs. Reeves that they must speak encouragingly and cheerfully of every thing connected with Moorlands, and especially hold out the prospect of often meeting Rilworth friends, from the distance between the two places being so short. — “We shall often see you in Rilworth in the summer, Mrs. Ashton, I have no doubt,” said Mr. Reeves, as he shook hands with her cordially. “Your son will drive you in and out easily, he has a capital horse.” Poor Mr. Reeves! he had no sooner said the words than he remembered that he had made a most painful allusion. Katharine’s colour changed, and she looked anxiously at her mother. Mrs. Ashton sat down in a chair and her hand trembled nervously. She did not attempt to speak. Mrs. Reeves tried to turn her attention, and remarked that Katharine was such a good walker she should expect to see her at least two or three times a week, if she did not make herself too useful with the children so as not to be spared. The mention of the children caught Mrs. Ashton’s ear, as it always did, and she remarked, with the pride of a grandmother, that they were very fine children, and very good, considering their high spirits, and no doubt now that Kate would be able to attend to them, there would not be better children in the country. “It is certainly a good thing for them we are going there,” she said; “my daughter-in-law has but indifferent health, ma’am, as perhaps you know, and children require constant looking after.”

“And you won’t let your daughter work too hard, Mrs. Ashton, I hope,” said Mr. Reeves, relieved at finding a subject which was not likely to have distressing associations. “I can’t feel that she is out of my care though she is out of my parish.” — Mrs. Ashton smiled a little. “Kate would not like to think she was out of

your care, sir, any more than I should. You have been a good friend to her, I am sure, and Mrs. Reeves too; very kind friends to all of us — all," she repeated, her voice sinking lower; "and it was felt, sir, and talked about. I hope you believe that." She put out her hand and tears coursed each other down her cheeks. — Mr. Reeves could only say, "Indeed I know it; God bless you;" and there was a kind, warm pressure of hands; and then Mrs. Ashton rose and walked away. Katharine followed her friends to the door. The parting was less to her than to her mother, as she would probably have so many more opportunities of seeing them. "There will always be luncheon for you at our house, Katharine," said Mrs. Reeves, "when you walk in from Moorlands." — "And always a corner in my study when you want to talk," said Mr. Reeves. "Remember, we are friends always."

Yes, Katharine felt that nothing worldly could interpose to sever such a tie as theirs.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SIX months from that time it was spring; cold and mocking, as the spring in England for the most part is — except when met with in books. A fire had been lighted in the breakfast-parlour at Moorlands, to please Selina, who came down stairs every morning shivering, and protested she could not eat her breakfast without one, though she would not sit in the room afterwards, because it was not the drawing-room. Katharine was glad of the comfort for her mother's sake, otherwise the two fires were an irritating little piece of extravagance. Mrs. Ashton was better in some respects for the change to the country — she had a better appetite, and her spirits were more even; but she was looking very old, — older, Katharine often thought, than her age; and she was less able to bear up against any thing like worry.

Katharine tried to save her annoyance as much as she possibly could; but it was impossible to succeed always. Mrs. Ashton was an extremely active person, and found her chief occupation and amusement in managing the household department of the farm, which Selina was only too glad to give up to her to a certain extent, but she was not allowed to be entire mistress, and, as a necessary consequence, there were perpetual frets. Power was on one side, common sense on the other; a most unfortunate

state of affairs for the family peace. Not that Mrs. Ashton was angry, she was too fond of John, and too partial to every thing belonging to him to be that ; but she was sorrowful, and that to some dispositions is more trying. Selina would willingly have received a good lecture in exchange for the suppressed sighs, and "Ah! in my time it was different!" which met her ear continually. Like the generality of ignorant people, she was very conceited ; and even when she admitted her blunders herself, never allowed any one else to second the assertion. She came down stairs this morning very late—not an unusual circumstance—and when breakfast was half over. A seat had been reserved for her near the fire ; and Katharine poured out her tea, whilst John cut a slice of bread, and asked her if she would not like a rasher of bacon. A very good and comfortable commencement ! And Selina, having kissed the two children, and said "good morning," and "thank you," in return for the general civility, began to eat. "You said you would have some bacon, didn't you, Selina?" said Katharine. "Johnnie can run out and order some."—"Why not ring the bell?" asked Selina.—"Because, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, "I suspect Anne is out in the back yard."—"Now!" inquired Selina, looking up quickly ; "she knows we are at breakfast, and she may be wanted."—"Well! that's very true, my dear ; but the fact is, she left the back yard in such a mess last evening with rubbish lying about, that I told her they had better clear it the first thing this morning. So run, Johnnie, and tell her what's wanted."—"I don't see that it's her business to clear the yard," observed Selina, as the child left the room. "Roger ought to see to it."—"He is busy about the fences, Selly," observed John ; "and it's Anne who makes the mess."—"Yes," said Mrs. Ashton ; "she is very careless, I must say that, and extravagant. All sorts of things I see thrown out there, which in my day would have been put aside and made use of in some way."—"A very odd use, I should think," replied Selina ; "at least I am sure I never see any thing there that is fit to be touched with a pair of tongs."—"Perhaps not to your eyes, my dear," answered Mrs. Ashton ; "because you have never been taught to look after things ; but I know I did see yesterday a china plate, and a broken glass, tossed up in the corner, with a heap of dirt and rubbish, which might quite well have been mended, if any one would have taken the trouble. Kate would have put them together in no time."—"Those things never last, and one can buy china and glass for a mere song in these days," observed Selina carelessly.—"Not for so little as you think, Selly," re-

marked John; "at least if people insist upon having cut glass and fine painted china, as you do."—"Oh! that's only for parties," replied Selina. "Of course I expect it then, because I was always accustomed to it; and I didn't marry to come down in the world."—"You may have to do it in spite of that," said John in a tone so low that only Katharine, who was setting next him, caught it.—Mrs. Ashton, who had been brooding in thought over the back yard and the broken plate, now spoke again: "It is not only about breakages that Anne is careless," she said, "but it's about every thing. I declare it's a shame to see what she tosses to the pigs every day. Why there's many a poor creature would be thankful for it. In my days the mistress of a farm wouldn't have allowed a scrap to be wasted."—"She must have had enough to do then," replied Selina, not looking up from the table, but helping herself to some butter with a pettish air. "I wonder what that girl is about not bringing the bacon."—"You have not given her very much time," observed Katharine, gently.—Selina replied by taking upon her plate a scrap of nearly cold bacon left in the dish, which she ate with the air of a martyr. "You will have given trouble for nothing, Selly, if you don't eat the bacon when it comes," said John.—"I am a great deal too busy to wait," answered Selina. "If the bacon had been kept hot for me it would have been all very well." This was said with a reproachful glance at Katharine, who being generally the first to appear at the breakfast-table, was held to be responsible for all that went on there.—"It was stupid of me not to think of it," said Katharine; "but," she added, with a smile, "you must send us word next time, Selina, when you intend to be late."—"No need of that," observed John; "you have but to reckon one day like another, things are all much the same. Take my word for it, there is no one loves her bed better than Selly does."—"And no wonder, when I go to bed so tired," replied Selina; "I am sure, John, if you felt what I feel at night, we shouldn't see you down stairs till nine o'clock in the morning. As it is, I am never later than a little past eight."—"Half-past eight it was full this morning," observed John, looking at his watch; "I wish, mother, you could give Selly some of your good habits of getting up early."—"You should set me a good example yourself, John," observed Selina sharply; "I hear you say every day that you hav'n't half time enough for what you have to look after."—"John is very much improved," said Mrs. Ashton. "It used to be sad work before he turned farmer. But young people in these days are not at all like what they were in mine. Why, a farm-

house used to be thought nothing of if the mistress wasn't up at the cock-crowing, seeing after the maids, and looking into the dairy; being here, and there, and every where."—"I suppose in regular farmhouses it is much the same kind of thing now," observed Selina; "but when I married it wasn't with the notion of becoming a farmer's wife."—"Then you should not have married John," said Katharine, a little thoughtlessly.—Selina pouted: "John never told me I was to be a farmer's wife," she said; "he offered me a home in the country."—"Well! my dear, and you have got it," observed Mrs. Ashton, in a tone of surprise.—"Yes, so far as wheat and turnips make the country," replied Selina; "but he knew very well that wasn't what I meant."—"I promised you you should have all I could give you," said John; "and you have got it; I am sure it is not I who have broken the agreement."—"People who live in country-houses don't get up at the cock-crowing to look after their dairies," observed Selina. "Perhaps it would be well for some of them if they did," replied Katharine; "at least if all the stories are true which are told of their extravagances."—"What will you do when you are a settler's wife, Selly," inquired John; "if you can't manage a farm in England?"—"A settler's wife is quite different to my notions," replied Selina; "the work is what every one does, and I suppose I could do the same."—"But, as you are not going to be a settler's wife, my dear," said Mrs. Ashton, "it's not much good talking about it." Mrs. Ashton could not help saying this, for she had an unaccountable dislike to the subject.—"Stranger things than that have happened," observed John; "and, for my part, I don't see what there is to dislike in the notion. A man goes out, we will say, to Australia,—finds a good climate, food plentiful, and land to be had for the asking; and let him begin with a moderate capital, and work well, and in a few years he has made his fortune."—"And can retire," added Selina, an observation which John did not echo.—"A rolling stone gathers no moss," remarked Katharine; "that is a proverb I have great faith in, John. If you are doing well here, why shouldn't you be contented to remain?"—"Why should I, if I can do better elsewhere?" said John.—"But you are not sure that you will do better, and it is a speculation," said Katharine; "and I can't help dreading speculations."—"As for that," observed John, "I have known a great many men who have made speculations which answered, and I don't see why I am not to be of the number."—"Because you never have succeeded yet, for one reason," replied Katharine. "I can't help thinking now and then," she added, "that there is

a special ordering in these things, and that some persons are born to succeed by what we call good fortune, and others by hard work ; and I am sure good fortune is not our gift, but hard work is. We should never have been what we are if it hadn't been for hard work, should we, mother, dear?" and she turned to her mother, and kissed her.—Mrs. Ashton, who had been sitting very silent and grave while the conversation went on, wiped away a gathering tear and answered : " No Kate, that's true enough ; but I don't see why poor John is to work so hard as to be obliged to go to Australia, or to do any thing, in short, but stay here. I am sure we'll help him to the utmost, as we have always told him."—" Thank you, mother," said John, bluntly but heartily ; " I know you won't quarrel with me if I take you at your word ; but perhaps there are others who may ;" and he glanced at Katharine.—" If you mean me, John," replied Katharine, trying not to show that she was hurt, " you know quite well that I would do every thing in reason that I could for you ; but I do like to see the wisdom of things first, I own."—" So like you, Katharine," said Selina ; " always putting spokes in the wheel. But, as I say to John very often, why trouble about having things straight here, and putting yourself under obligations, when you might be off to another country, and set up quite fresh, and live like a gentleman?"—" I thought you were bent upon never leaving Moorlands, my dear," said Mrs. Ashton, in an accent of alarm.—" Not if we can live here as I was led to expect," replied Selina ; " but if it's to be a question of having all one's comforts grudged one, and being turned into a mere farm drudge, why then I say, it's better to be off." Every one was silenced by this remark, and all felt it a relief when the slice of hot bacon appeared to engross Selina's attention. Katharine was very much pained at the turn the conversation had taken ; observations of the same kind had been made before, but never so strongly, and she began to think over what she had said, and to consider whether she was in the habit of interfering unnecessarily.

John sat playing with his knife and fork for some minutes, and then rose suddenly, and said he must not waste time there any longer, and left the room. Katharine followed him : " Are you so very busy, John ? Might I say just one word to you ?" He stood still in the passage. " If you would just not talk about Australia before my mother !" said Katharine, beseechingly ; " you don't know how it frets her. It is all nonsense, I know ; but she does not think it so."—" I'll tell you what, Katharine," replied John—and he opened the door of a little back room, used as a store-

room, and, making her enter, closed it carefully again—"it is not so much nonsense as you may think for. It's all very well to talk of stones gathering no moss because they are rolling stones, but if they gather none by standing still, why then they must roll."—"But you are gathering, dear John, are not you? I thought every thing was going on better."—"That's because you know nothing about it, Kate; but what troubles me now, and troubles Selina too, is a present pressure. I didn't want to talk to you about it if I could help it, but I can't. There's a debt." Katharine's heart sank. "A question of thirty pounds."—"Owing to whom?" asked Katharine, quickly.—"Well, it's a question between Charles Ronaldson and me. You see, it was when the rent was behindhand in the winter, just after you came here, and when all things else were comfortable. I wrote to Ronaldson, and he wouldn't let me say any thing to my mother or you, for fear of worrying you, and we both thought that if we could get over the difficulties at that moment all would go well, and so he advanced me the money; and Selly was then so bent upon remaining here, that she agreed to promise him repayment from thirty pounds which was to come to her by the legacy; you remember, when old Miss Fowler died, it was left her. I trusted to that, and now I find that the money is gone. Selly says she could not help it—that she was obliged to pay some old bills for her dress and the children's, and buy some new things, and that she could not ask me, and so she took the thirty pounds. I can't say how that may have been, it's no use to inquire now, but sure enough the money is gone."—"Thirty pounds!" said Katharine; "such a very large sum that is. What can she have done with it?"—"No matter for that, Kate," exclaimed John, who, like most husbands, especially disliked his sister's finding fault with his wife; "the question is what is to be done now. The loan was for six months, and I promised Ronaldson he should have it back again to the day, because he told me he should be hard up on account of having to help some relations this year."—"Then it must be repaid," said Katharine, thoughtfully.—"Yes, but how? I have not ten pounds to spare."—"If Selina promised it, she is the person responsible," said Katharine.—"But what is the use of talking of a person's responsibility when there is nothing to be responsible with?"—Katharine felt herself a great coward, yet she spoke bravely: "You must forgive me, John, dear," she said, "if I say any thing to vex you. I don't mean to do it, but this sort of thing may happen again, so it is best to be open at once. If it was a question of helping you about the farm, or if you had

got behind-hand from bad seasons or losses, it would be a different matter; but if the money has gone for Selina's pleasure, I don't think really it ought to come upon my mother, which is, of course, what you are looking to. You know the old debts have fallen off to much less than we expected, and what with the expense of removing, and one thing and another, my mother will have but a very poor year; in fact, I know that she couldn't possibly let you have the money without great difficulty, such as would very much worry her, and she is not well enough or strong enough to bear that kind of thing. She has never been used to business, and it presses upon her, and so I do think that the money ought to be found some other way."—"How?" was John's short reply.—"Well! I think Selina ought to go to her father. He is making money now, and he has done nothing scarcely for her since she married. It really is not fair, John, that all the burden should fall upon my mother."—"Thank you, Katharine," said John; "and for your information I may tell you, that you may just as well ask that wall for money as old Fowler."—"Possibly, yet still he ought to be asked, and Selina ought to ask him."—"You may tell her this," said John; "I shall not, trust me." He paced the room in evident anger; then stopping, exclaimed, "It is very well for you, Katharine, to throw off all obligation upon Selly and me, but I can tell you, you have got your share of it too. If it was not for the old feeling, Ronaldson would never be the friend to us he is, you may depend upon that." Katharine felt herself turn pale; but it was the only sign of emotion which she gave, and she replied, in a tone of unconcern, "I don't see what that has to do with the question in point."—"Well, other persons do, if you don't," replied John; "Selly said to me this morning, when I talked of writing to Ronaldson, and letting him know that the affair must stand over for the present, that she was certain if you knew it you never would allow it, for it was all done for your sake."—Katharine's sensitive feelings were touched to the quick; and she was no longer calm as she replied, "Selina has no business to make Mr. Ronaldson's feelings or mine a matter of calculation; and she has no right to say that all he has done has been for my sake. She can know nothing of the matter, and I beg, John, that you will tell her so from me."—"Umph!" exclaimed John, opening his eyes; "I didn't know, Kate, we could have such a spirit now—it's quite like the old times." Katharine turned to the window, and did not speak. John looked at her for a few moments, and seeing that she was really annoyed, his affectionate feelings were worked upon, and he went up to her, and said,

patting her shoulder, "Come, Kata, don't be angry: where's the harm, after all, of thinking that a man is not a weathercock?"—"Because there is no foundation for what you say," replied Katharine, still averting her face; "and if there were, I don't know.—I can't bear it's being made a matter of calculation. I—Oh! John, if you would never say such things again!"—"But why care, Kate?" asked her brother kindly, yet with some surprise; "if it is all moonshine, what does it signify?"—Katharine's heart throbbed quickly, then it stopped for an instant. She felt very guilty, for she could not bear that suggestion. "I don't know why I care," she said, "I can't talk about it."—"Well, you women are most unaccountable beings," exclaimed John; "one never knows what to be at with you. I should have thought, now, you would have been flattered by the notion of a man like Ronaldson keeping true to you for so many years, and it would have seemed most natural that you should have looked kindly upon him. But you never were like any one else, Katharine, and so I shall tell him."—"Tell him? for pity's sake what do you mean, John?" exclaimed Katharine, in a voice of agony. John had evidently spoken very incautiously, for he did what men are not much in the habit of doing—he coloured and looked confused, and turned off the answer hastily, saying, "After all, that's nothing to the point; am I to write and tell him he can't have the money?"

Both John and Selina had judged so far wisely, that Katharine could less bear the idea of that now than before; but she still kept to her first opinion, and repeated that an application ought to be made to Mr. Fowler. John was annoyed; but there was sense in what she said, and he could not gainsay it. They both stood for some time in silent thought, and then John, without uttering another word, walked away, closing the door behind him with violence.

Katharine longed to bring him back; she felt as if she must return to the subject which had so quickly escaped her. She must know what John alluded to, and what he thought of saying to Charles Ronaldson. That was more important to her far, at the moment, than the question of the money. The old feeling! surely John had some reason for thinking that it existed. Could any thing have been said to him? Was it only Selina's gossip? And what did he mean by declaring he would tell Charles that she was unlike every one else? How would it be possible for him to touch upon the subject unless Charles himself had commenced it? Perhaps he had done so; perhaps—

Katharine started, and awoke to the consciousness of indulging a dangerous dream, one which pained and humbled her. She was thinking of one who, it might be, had given up all thoughts of her. With a strong mental effort she dashed aside the thought, and returned to the unwelcome consideration of the debt.

CHAPTER XLV

THAT debt was paid by Mrs. Ashton ; so were many others—some of them John's, many Selina's. The family expenses did not decrease, as Katharine had hoped they would ; and John's income did not increase, as John had insisted it must. It was difficult to say exactly where the fault lay ; but probably the chief cause of blame was with Selina. John certainly worked hard ; but he was not an experienced farmer, and what he gained his wife spent. So, again, Mrs. Ashton was an excellent manager ; but the orders which she gave Selina contradicted. Katharine, too, not only preached but practised economy, diligently and perseveringly, especially as regarded the children ; but she was the aunt, Selina the mother. Her authority was not paramount, and Selina was jealous of it, and often opposed it from the mere desire to show, as she said, that she was mistress in her own house and over her own children. Often and often Katharine recurred to her father's words,—his prophecy (as it now seemed) that she would be the best friend the little ones would have,—in order to support her in the task she had undertaken. Yet this, perhaps, was the least trying work she could have had ; for, notwithstanding all Selina's follies, the children did repay in a great measure the labour bestowed upon them. They were excessively fond of Aunt Kate, and always obedient to her, however trying and naughty they might be with others. They were quick too in learning, and Katharine found it quite pleasant to be obliged from duty to recall some of her own lessons learnt at Miss Richardson's ; and they were an excuse also for many independent walks, and gave her opportunities of visiting amongst the poor. She remembered Mr. Reeves' injunction, not to make herself too necessary to Selina ; but it was very difficult to keep it, especially when she felt that if she were not there it would be requisite either to have a governess for the children, which would be an expense beyond her brother's means, or else leave them entirely to

neglect. It seemed better at once to assume the duty which was put upon her, and make it her own, and in that way to draw a definite line, beyond which she was not to be required to go.

This resolution was adhered to. Selina would often willingly have taken advantage of Katharine's being at home to leave some household duty to her superintendence, and then go herself into Rilworth, to spend an idle gossiping afternoon with old and new acquaintances; but Katharine in these cases took her own view of what was right. She had the care of the children in the afternoon, when the nurse was busy, and she always took them out for a walk; and this reason she gave and persisted in, when Selina would fain have put the children aside, and locked them up in the nursery to play, whilst she made Katharine do her work, and went herself in search of amusement.

Selina did not love Katharine the more for all this. It was extremely irritating to a person of her selfish disposition to have some one always in the house so useful that she could not be spared, and so quietly determined to follow her own views of right that nothing could turn her, and yet so good and superior that every one unconsciously deferred to her.

And Katharine herself was not perfect; she had the natural defects which seem inseparable from the good qualities that made her what she was. She could not always speak gently, or conceal her disapprobation; and still oftener she was tempted to give advice at awkward moments. Most earnestly religious she was, most entirely humble,—the first to see her own faults, and acknowledge them; but all this was lost upon Selina. The candour, and simplicity, and sincerity, which would have neutralised defects greater than Katharine's in the eyes of those who could value her as she deserved, were not perceived or understood by Selina. One hasty word, one incautious observation, was treasured up and brooded over, and exaggerated; and days, and weeks, and months of kindness and energy, and never-weary forgetfulness of self, were counted as nothing in comparison. The smallest divergence in the direction of two lines may lead to infinite separation. So it must be in the natural world, so it may be in the moral. Yet the breach widens day by day imperceptibly; and in the case of Katharine and Selina, perhaps only a very keen-sighted person would have traced it to its results. One indication of what these might be was to be found in the frequent recurrence to the old painful subject of emigration. Before Mrs. Ashton settled at Moorlands Selina had been in despair at the thought, now she was constantly bringing it up,—alluding to

it,—speaking of it,—as a possibility; sometimes even urging it, in a way which made Mrs. Ashton unhappy, and Katharine angry. For, notwithstanding John's forebodings, Katharine herself had greater hopes than she had ever had before of the success of the farm; partly, perhaps, she was buoyed up by Charles Ronaldson's judgment, but in a great measure the opinion was the result of her own observation. Selina was the great difficulty here, as she was in almost every other case; and Katharine often found herself sighing, as in the old days, and repeating, "Oh! the marriage."

That constant occupation, constant fret and anxiety, formed Katharine's outward life. There were two other lives: one, known but to few, of cherished affection, and the cultivation of her higher tastes; and the other, dependent upon the former, yet above and beyond it, seen only by the eye of God.

The latter is a life of which it is given to human beings to judge only by external signs, and those often liable to misconception; yet it would have been impossible to watch Katharine Ashton's daily conduct, her devoted attention to her mother, her habitual self-control, her forbearance, and patience, and humility, and unselfishness, and not feel that the principles which influenced her must have something in them unlike those of the world. Katharine was consistent, the world is inconsistent. But Katharine never spoke of her feelings; she did not always know that she possessed them. She was as free from self-consciousness now in religion as she had been in her early days in things of less moment. One motive was always present to her, guiding, checking, urging her; but she seldom examined it, except in its effects, and certainly she could not have described it. It had become literally a second nature. As in her childhood, she loved her parents without effort or change, not realising her affection to herself, yet constantly acting upon it; so now she loved her God.

And the trials of life were light to her; light even was the sorrow which lingered by her father's grave; light the annoyance of her daily life; light the cloud of trouble which rested upon the future. The burden was borne for her, and it left few traces, even upon her outward form. It would not have been so with all persons.

As there are trials so keen that even the most obedient, submissive hearts are wounded by them to the quick, so also there are those, good, devoted, pure-minded, whose nature, being less buoyant, will sink under the same pressure which others bear with composure. If Jane Forbes and Katharine Ashton had changed positions in life, they would have gone through the same

amount of suffering with very different results as regarded their own minds, and probably, also, as regards the consequences of their trial. Had Katharine been in Jane's place, Colonel Forbes might never have become the domestic tyrant which he was ; and had Jane been in Katharine's place, Selina might possibly have contented herself with the usefulness of a person so entirely enduring, and so gentle in the expression of her disapprobation, and never have felt the wish to change her home at Moorlands for the life of a settler's wife in Australia. The difference between the two was not a question of feeling. Katharine's feelings were as acute and intense as Jane's, but she was braver, both physically and morally ; Katharine would have been courageous without religion, Jane was so in consequence of it. Religious principles must necessarily be stronger than any others, and therefore in bygone days Jane's power over Katharine had been very marked ; now they were in that respect on an equality, and Katharine's superior strength of mind resumed its natural influence. Very touching it was to watch the progress of that influence as months glided by. Jane, in the midst of luxury and refinement, struggling against a deeply-rooted sorrow, and the forebodings of depressing illness, and resting with the confidence of long-tried affection upon the simple-hearted, energetic, earnest mind, which had received through her means the first strong impulse of spiritual growth ; and Katharine, humble, and self-distrusting, yet, impelled by her own sound judgment and quick perception, watching over Jane with the tender reverential care of a nurse over a cherished foster-child.

There was much need for such care. Katharine was learning to put aside the thought of Colonel Forbes, and bear with coldness, and almost incivility, for Jane's sake. How long the endurance might be required who could say ? If Jane were fading, it was by very slow degrees, and the spring of life in one so young might last for many years. But Katharine never thought of her as living to old age, or even middle age. When once her eyes had been opened to Jane's danger, she could see how every little vexation and care worked upon her bodily frame ; and if it did not increase the tendency to disease, at least weakened the strength required to bear up against it.

And Colonel Forbes knew all this. He had been told of the possible evil ; he had been shocked and distressed, and for a time had shown Jane such tender affection, that Katharine could not wonder at the fascination which, in former days, he had exercised over her. When he was really kind, the charm of his manner

was such as it seemed scarcely possible to resist. But the first alarm passed off, the danger seemed to have been magnified, and then the old selfishness returned, and Colonel Forbes was selfish and exacting as before. His first softened feelings had, however, been a great assistance to Katharine in retaining her footing at Maplestead. When Colonel Forbes was told that the state of his wife's health was such as to render quietness of mind and freedom from vexation essential even for her life, he would have been less than human if he had refused to allow her the occasional sympathy of the person who, more than any other, really seemed to understand her feelings, and to be able to decide wisely upon the little doubtful points arising from illness and the cares of a household. And Colonel Forbes knew well that he had himself cut his wife off from the friendship of the persons more immediately in her own rank. He had severed her even from his relations. His sisters would not, like Jane, bear with his temper, and submit implicitly to his will. They seldom came to Maplestead; when they did, it was as formal visitors. Jane's only friend, before marriage, had been her mother, and she had had no opportunity of making any since; for Colonel Forbes, caring for nothing but politics, would invite to his house none but political allies, and would not give himself the trouble to entertain ladies merely for the sake of politeness, though, if it were to gain a political point, he did not scruple to fill his house with them. When Jane, now and then, proposed inviting the few persons amongst her acquaintances whose society she felt inclined to cultivate, she was stopped by the remark, "Really, my love, we are so little alone, I should think you might allow us to be these few days together without any one." Jane had by degrees become accustomed to this state of things; and perhaps she would not at last have wished to alter it. Illness indisposed her for the labour of entertaining guests—that was one feeling; but another, and probably a much stronger one, was, that even now she could not feel any thing to be a pleasure which her husband did not share. Katharine could never have been to her what she was if their intercourse had commenced after Jane's marriage. It was the early tie, which could not be broken; and it was this which induced Colonel Forbes to bear with it. A new feeling might have excited his jealousy, but this was an old, lingering weakness, which he did not approve, but which he endured, because Jane was not in a state to allow of its being put a stop to.

But even without this unusual spirit of forbearance on the part of Colonel Forbes, it would have been extremely difficult to

quarrel with Katharine. She was so entirely unobtrusive, the most fastidious taste could not have been offended by her simple, even homely manner; the most sensitive ear could not have caught a shade of undue familiarity in her tone. Utterly devoid of pretension, with a quiet self-respect, and inborn dignity of mind, she was precisely the same when conversing with Jane at Maplestead as in the back parlour behind her father's shop; and this propriety of feeling was useful to Jane, as well as to herself. There were times when Jane, in the fulness of her gratitude, and the strength of her feeling for Katharine, might have been induced to make her her companion in a way which would have irritated her husband. It seemed unkind, for instance, after Katharine had been talking with her for perhaps an hour before luncheon, entering into her plans for the poor, suggesting arrangements for her comfort, taking from her the work of keeping charity accounts, to allow her to go home without showing her the common civility of offering her refreshment, and Jane often pressed her to remain; but Katharine never allowed herself to take advantage of the offer, and put herself in Colonel Forbes's way. She saw that if she could ever hope really to be a comfort to Jane it must be by the unobtrusiveness which her own good taste suggested. It might be very right in Jane to wish to show her attentions, but it would be neither right nor wise in herself to accept them. And by this means she retained her footing in the family under circumstances which would have been fatal to one less simple-minded. For Colonel Forbes was not a man to forget his enmity, even when the immediate cause had passed away. Four months after Katharine's removal to Moorlands he was elected member for the county by a triumphant majority; but John Ashton, though he would not vote against him, refused to vote for him; and all his especial friends—Henry Madden in particular—exerted themselves for the opposite candidate. These deeds were treasured up to be avenged when the fitting opportunity should arrive. In one way Colonel Forbes's feeling was shown at once—his custom was taken from all the chief tradesmen in Rilworth who were known to hold contrary opinions to his own. Henry Madden was the first to suffer; and, through him, Mrs. Ashton, Katharine, and, as a consequence, John and Selina, suffered likewise. Jane had long expected this; but it fretted her excessively when the order was given to put the threat in execution. She hoped at first that the personal inconvenience caused by it would have induced Colonel Forbes to relent; but he was a martyr to his cause, and when he found that he could not provide himself with books and periodicals

as easily as before, he took great trouble, and entered into considerable expense, in assisting to set up an opposition shop, which was to be patronised by all the leaders of his party. Jane could have borne the annoyance well enough if the question in point had been one of religious or moral interest; but it was only one of finance, extremely important, doubtless, to the general interests of the county, but upon which very good people might well be allowed to differ. Colonel Forbes's example was followed by others; the arrangements for the opposition shop were progressing speedily; and in the meantime no member of the Maplestead family was allowed to have any dealings with Mr. Madden, and whatever could not be purchased at the smaller shops in Rilworth, was sent for direct from London.

It went like a dagger through Jane's heart, to hear Katharine say—as she did without remembering the complaint implied in her words—that Mr. Madden was dreadfully disappointed at the profits of the business, and already began to think that it would be impossible to keep to his engagement, as to the yearly sum he was to pay; but that was one of the few topics upon which it would not be wise to enter, and Jane passed off the remark at the time, but kept it to brood over, and distress herself afterwards.

And so time wore on, bringing few marked changes, yet all things working secretly towards the accomplishment of the allotted trial of each, even as from the hour of our birth the imperceptible progress of decay is leading us forward to the final hour of death.

Jane spent the summer at Maplestead in better health and spirits. Now that Katharine was at Moorlands, she was much happier about all her little plans for the poor people. She had not much assistance from the clergyman of the parish, who was an old man, and lived at some distance; and hitherto she had been obliged to give up all that she could not actually superintend herself. But Katharine managed a large share of active work in her walks with the children, and found it very pleasant to have an object beyond mere exercise, and, perhaps, was not sorry to have an excuse for frequently going to Maplestead. A few people in Rilworth were still occasionally visited, and Mr. Reeves always applied to them for help in cases of extreme distress; but there was quite sufficient for daily care in the poverty about Maplestead; and the apathy of the clergyman threw a great deal of work both upon Katharine and Jane, which was useful as occupying their thoughts, though very painful in other ways. Happily for Katharine, she had respected and obeyed Mr. Reeves

as much for his office as for himself, and her principles did not fail her, as is too often the case, when she was left without the help of a clergyman's guidance, or the comfort of the week-day services which in Rilworth she had been able often, though not regularly, to attend.

Towards the autumn, Mrs. Ashton's health began to fail, and this kept Katharine more in the house. She was not anxious at first, for the illness seemed merely the result of a cold; but months went by, and her mother still complained of weakness, and evidently found it an exertion to attend to any household matters; and then Katharine began to be a little uneasy—not openly—not allowing it even to herself in words, but showing it to others by the pertinacious way in which she insisted upon saying that the weather was so bad, no one could expect to be well. Selina did not like illness any more than Colonel Forbes, and often hinted that Katharine encouraged her mother in her fireside habits, and that it would be much better if Mrs. Ashton were roused, and made to go out in spite of the weather; but there was a secret feeling in Katharine's mind which whispered that the "days of mourning" were at hand, and she would not in thought, or word, or deed, lay up one memory of self-reproach to add to the coming sorrow.

She worked very hard all that autumn. Mrs. Ashton fretted herself when she found it impossible to superintend every thing as she had been used to do, and seemed to Katharine to have an instinctive perception of mismanagement. Katharine became quite learned in dairy work before many weeks had passed, when she found how quick her mother was in discovering that the butter and cheese were not as well made as they ought to be; and looked after the back yard, and the poultry, and the pigs, as diligently as if she had been used to them all her life; and she tried too to give little Clara a taste for the same pursuits, for she could see how necessary they would be. Selina's fine lady habits grew more rooted day by day, and if she talked of emigration and the colonies, it was always with the notion of carrying out gay dresses, and giving grand parties when they were settled there.

Winter found the rent behindhand still, and Mrs. Ashton was again applied to to make up the deficiency; precisely what Katharine had expected, but it did not make her the less uncomfortable. Mrs. Ashton gave the money so readily that John, she could see, was quite emboldened by it, and already began to look upon it as his right. His influence over his mother was daily increasing, and in many instances in which formerly she would

have had an opinion of her own, or been guided by the advice of Charles Ronaldson, she now acted under her son's direction. This naturally had the effect of inducing Charles Ronaldson to withhold his advice, even when he was asked for it. It was never followed, and so it seemed useless to offer it. The correspondence became less frequent, he no longer talked of wishing to pay them another visit, and it seemed to Katharine that the separation between them was complete. She could not bear to own to herself the effect which the thought had upon her. There was sufficient to depress her without imagining any humiliating reason. To see her mother gradually sinking into the helplessness of premature old age, and John yielding to Selina's extravagance, and making no effort against her selfish negligence in matters of imperative duty, was quite enough to teach her that life was becoming very serious and anxious; but when she boldly faced the trials which she knew and acknowledged, and strove earnestly to prepare for them in the only way by which she could be enabled to bear them, there was still a burden unrelieved, a weight which could not be accounted for, an aching longing for something she knew not what, or which at least she only guessed, and then endeavoured to forget, when a letter directed in Charles Ronaldson's hand made her heart throb with a feeling of painful excitement.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AND another spring came, warmer and more genial; the buds bursting into leaf, the hedges bright with wild flowers, and the gardens already filled with greenhouse plants. Jane and Katharine were sitting side by side on a bench at the end of the south terrace at Maplestead; the two children playing at a little distance with their nurse. Katharine was looking over the account book of the clothing club, which was not quite correct. She had come over to Maplestead for the purpose of having Jane's assistance in putting it right. The business was not very difficult, and it was soon finished; but Katharine still lingered, unwilling to say what was to be a long good-bye. Jane was going to London for three months, it might be more; Colonel Forbes had taken a house for that time, and the family were to remove directly. This was their first long absence since Katharine had been at Moorlands. Colonel Forbes had of course been away long

and often on account of his parliamentary business, but Jane had only been with him in London for a few weeks at a time, as her health generally made the country desirable for her. Now there was an idea of putting her more permanently under Dr. Lowe's care, for she had not been as well as usual for some weeks past.

"They will not play so merrily in London, I am afraid," said Jane, looking fondly at her children, as they ran races along the terrace, "or at least I shall not see them. That is what I dislike most in London: here, they are always with me." — "The time will go quicker than you think," replied Katharine, "and then you will enjoy the return home all the more." — Jane paused before replying — then she said quietly, "And if I were not here to see them, they would still enjoy themselves. Sometimes, Katharine," she added, "it seems as if whatever may come would be nothing if I could only know that they would be happy and safe; and then again, I grow very selfish and have a longing wish, that, if I should be taken from them soon, they may remember me, and that would sadden their lives." — "They would surely remember you, dear Mrs. Forbes," said Katharine, in a tone of calmness, which showed that the possibility alluded to was as familiar to her mind as it was to Jane's; "but I do not think it need sadden them, at least, not painfully. It would only give them another reason for being good." — "But who will teach them to remember me?" said Jane; "Philip cannot dwell upon sorrowful thoughts, it is not in his nature." — "God will teach them, surely," replied Katharine. "I don't think we know or understand how He makes such things work in children's minds." — "Yes," said Jane, "I ought to trust; if it were any thing else, I fancy I could easily; — but one's children! Oh! Katharine, you can little think what the thought of that wrench is!" — "I suppose that is the reason why, in the Bible, there are such promises about orphans," said Katharine. "They used to come to my mind very often when I was so unhappy the year before last; and just at first, when I could not do any thing else, I used to find them out and copy them into a book." — "That would be good for me too," said Jane; "I have found very often lately, that I cannot attend to reading, and then my thoughts dwell upon the future, and that, I am sure, is not good for mind or body." — "The past would be better than the future, I should think," observed Katharine; "at least, it seems to do me more real good to look upon it." — "It humbles one very much," said Jane. — "But I don't mean self-examination," replied Katharine, "but looking back as if one was reading a book about another

person, and seeing how one has managed to travel on so far. If I could have looked at myself," she added, "as I set out in life, and known what was before me, I should have been very much frightened." — "I think I should too," said Jane, in rather an absent manner, "though I had some great advantages — my mother took great care of me when she came from India; but then she had bad health, and at times, I was left very much to myself." — "It seems as if one had been perpetually escaping quicksands," said Katharine. Jane did not instantly reply, she was looking at her little girl, running down the steep slope of the terrace, and often it seemed in danger of falling. "She does not fall, though it seems as if she would," said Katharine, following what she saw was the direction of Jane's thoughts. Jane smiled. "Oh! Katharine, how quick you are in understanding! She does not fall, but it frightens one to watch her." — "Then, perhaps, it is ordered in great Mercy, that we are not always allowed to see her when she is in danger," replied Katharine. — "Yes, it must be Mercy," said Jane, thoughtfully; "it is want of faith which makes one long to stand and watch her. I wonder what it is that hinders one's faith so much." — "Mr. Reeves once said to me," observed Katharine, "that want of faith was occasioned generally by a fault in one's prayers." — "I have prayed," exclaimed Jane, clasping her hands together, "God knows how earnestly and how often! And at times, Katharine, the prayer has seemed to be answered, and I have felt that I could give them up; that I could leave my darlings to Him without even a passing fear. But it has all gone again. Sorrow has come, — yet not sorrow chiefly," she added, correcting herself, "but cares, and little troubles — things which pain and vex me, and then I have felt that I would give worlds to save them from the same trials, and, as if, though I could bear them myself, yet they would never be able to do so." — "One's prayers are very different at different times," said Katharine; "I am afraid for myself I cannot remember more than a very few which have been so earnest and trusting, that I could really feel I put the whole strength of my wishes into them. But I am sure those have been heard." — "Yet prayers for one's children must have one's whole heart," said Jane. — "I suppose," said Katharine, "they would have all one's heart in them, and something of one's will. It must be difficult to have a very great longing for a child to be happy, and yet to be quite contented that it should not be in one's own way. But then I am not a mother, and I can't tell," she added timidly. Jane thought for an instant,

"There must be something in that," she said. "I have a will for my children, I know. Perhaps, I ought to pray first to have that set right." — "The having a will of one's own, is one reason," said Katharine, "why I feel it is good to think about what has happened in one's past life. One can see so much more why things were allowed, and how good has come out of evil, and so one learns to distrust one's own wishes." — "But," continued Jane, "there is one wish which cannot be wilful, that those one loves may be kept safe." — "It seems as if it could not be," replied Katharine; "yet, I suppose, if we had quite our will, we should not place them in temptation." — "I am afraid," said Jane, "it is impossible not to wish that." — "But the Bible tells us of the trial of our faith working patience," continued Katharine; "so there may be wilfulness even in the wish for their safety, and that may make our prayers not so acceptable." Jane looked at her in surprise. "You must have thought about it all much more than I have, Katharine," she said; "and yet I have had more to make me think; and years ago, I used to feel that you would come to be taught by me in a certain way." — "I don't feel that I have thought about it at all," replied Katharine, quietly; "and, dear Mrs. Forbes, it was you who first taught me, if I have; but one can't help noticing some things, strange things, not miracles, but what seem quite as wonderful." — "About prayers?" said Jane. "Yes, how some are answered," replied Katharine, "when one could not have expected it; prayers especially which one makes at the Holy Communion; and when I have thought about them, I have always felt they were those which I put my heart into and my will too; as if, in a manner, I gave away myself and the persons I love to be taken care of by God, because I could not do any thing for them or for myself. I think," she continued, "that it would help me very much if I were anxious as you may be, and could do that heartily." — "Not having any wishes?" said Jane; "but that is the difficulty." — "Yes," repeated Katharine, "that is the difficulty; and I don't think it is for those who are not mothers to talk about it; so perhaps, I ought not to have said what I have." — "Oh! yes, yes," exclaimed Jane, "you have done me good, talking things over quietly always does." — "It helps me on always, to talk to you," continued Katharine. "Indeed, I never do really talk to any one else except Mr. Reeves now and then; and I can't put myself side by side with him, and so I don't like to say out little things, and I only go to him when I want him to advise me." — "Mr. Reeves and I used to talk at

one time," said Jane, "but we don't meet often now, and there is no one;"—she stopped. Katharine felt painfully all that was implied by the pause, but she could not notice it. "One thing Mr. Reeves told me one day," she said, "which has helped me a dood deal; it was when I had been saying to him the same kind of things which you have been saying to me, about not having faith, and when he warned me that my prayers might be in fault; I asked him what was likely to be most amiss in them, and he said that probably I had a strong will of my own, and so was like a person giving a half confidence; and when I asked him how to get rid of the will, he said, I was to begin practising in very tiny things, such as the weather, or disappointment, or little home worries, never complaining, or fretting, or allowing myself to wish things were different,—but taking just what was given me, as we make children take what is given them. I remember his saying, that two-thirds of the really good, earnest people we meet travel along the high road of duty like horses badly broken in. They advance, but they are always making little efforts to wander to the right or left; and so requiring the whip and the bridle. The notion helped me a good deal just then, for there were plenty of home troubles."—"As there are now, I am afraid," said Jane, kindly, "and here have I been talking of myself all the morning, and not once inquiring about you."—"The troubles are not much worse than usual," said Katharine; "only, I don't think my mother gets on; she is so weak, and has been so restless the last week. Mr. Fowler has given her some new medicine, but it does not agree with her. I don't let myself think," she added, trying to speak cheerfully, "about that or any thing."—"Not like me," replied Jane, and again her eyes rested upon her children. "I have not your trial," said Katharine, "it is much easier to bear anxiety for oneself than for others; but, then again, yours may only be in years to come."—Jane considered for an instant. "Yes, possibly; and it is better, as you say, not to think, except," and she spoke with an intensity of earnestness, "to be prepared. But Katharine," she added, suddenly changing her tone, "I must tell you what adds to all my troubles, really aggravates them—my maid. I thought she was going to be perfect, and she has turned out most imperfect. You can't recommend me one!"—"Immediately?" asked Katharine.—"No, not exactly immediately, I must take Dawson to town with me; and then I have been recommended to try a French maid." Katharine looked doubtful as to the success of the experiment.—"I am not inclined for it myself," continued Jane. "I would much rather have a

quiet, sober individual from Rilworth, if you could find me one. But if not, I perceive that some day in utter despair, I shall be compelled to accept the Duchess of Lowther's offer of a Mademoiselle Laurette. So you will bear me in mind, won't you? You know really what I want." Katharine promised,—she had not had much experience of lady's maids herself, but Miss Carter always knew something about them, and she was a safe person to apply to. "And now, dear Mrs. Forbes, please, I must go," said Katharine, rising. "You will be so very good as to let me know sometimes how you are, won't you? I always learn more from what you leave unsaid, than from what other people say." Jane smiled, and declared she must be very careful how she worded her letter,—but she certainly would write, and she trusted that Katharine would sometimes let her know about all the poor people and her own home affairs. "I never forget them, Katharine, though I do live in the whirl of London life," she said.—"No, indeed, I am certain of that," was Katharine's reply; she was going to add something else, but her eye at that moment caught the figure of Colonel Forbes at the other end of the shrubbery near the house. She hurried her departure immediately, and Jane did not press her to remain, though she pressed her hand affectionately, and said, "God bless you, dear Katharine, and give you help at all times."—"Thank you so much," and Katharine turned away, with a glistening eye, and the prayer that Jane herself might never be left without the same aid.

She walked along the terrace, hoping to turn into a side path, and avoid Colonel Forbes, but unfortunately she blundered and came directly upon him: she would have passed on, but—very unlike himself—he stopped her and spoke. It was only, however, to inquire whether her brother was at home. Katharine never could feel comfortable when any business was going on between John and Colonel Forbes. She had an instinctive perception of the hidden enmity, and a dread that John would in some way or other be injured. "I should be glad to see him if he could call this evening," continued Colonel Forbes. "We go to town to-morrow, as perhaps you know."—"I will tell my brother, Sir," was Katharine's reply, and again she would have moved on.—"In case he should not be able to come, perhaps you will be good enough to give him a message from me," pursued the Colonel. "He called to see me a few days since upon a matter of business. Pray tell him I shall be able to put him in a way of gaining all the information he wants." The manner of this speech was more strange to Katharine than the matter. It was wonderfully cordial,

but she did not trust it. Just then the two children ran up to them. They had gathered some flowers, and Jane had sent them for Katharine to take back to Moorlands. "Mamma thinks Mrs. Ashton will like them," said Lucy, "and she hopes you will carry them to her."—"And these are for yourself," continued Philip, and as Katharine bent down to take them, he put his little arm round her neck, and added, "I wish you would go to London with us; Mamma wants it too."—"Oh! do, do," exclaimed Lucy, clapping her hands, and then seizing Katharine's dress to prevent her escaping. "You will not want me in London, Miss Lucy," said Katharine, trying to disengage herself; "there will be so many beautiful sights to see."—"But we shall want you dreadfully," continued Lucy, in a tone which showed that the wish was becoming quite serious; "and you shall go with us to see the sights. Shan't she, Papa? Do make her come, please do." Both the children left Katharine and laid siege to their father. "Don't, my loves, don't; you will tear my coat;"—and the children shrank back instantly, as children always do when they are addressed in a tone of irritation. "Perhaps Mamma will let you write me a little note," said Katharine, trying to divert their attention, "and tell me all you see in London. I shall like that very much."—"And then you will write me a little note?" said Lucy, quickly.—"And me too!" exclaimed Philip, "you will write to both of us; but we would much rather you should go with us," he added, sorrowfully.—"Yes, much rather," repeated Lucy. Katharine kissed them again, and whispered that she hoped they would be very good children, and not give poor Mamma any trouble. "Why do you call Mamma poor," exclaimed Philip, fixing his large black eyes upon her with a curious mixture of anger and astonishment.—"Only because she is ill," said Katharine.—"Is she ill?" asked Lucy, thoughtfully. "Is she very ill?"—"We hope she is not," was Katharine's evasive reply.—"But really; is she really very ill? Papa will tell me," and the child ran up to her father, who was standing a few paces off, talking to a gardener. "Is Mamma very ill?" she exclaimed, catching hold of his hand and her eyes filling with tears. "Miss Ashton is afraid for her."—Katharine heard the words and trembled. There was the well-known scowl on Colonel Forbes' forehead, as he patted his child's head and answered, "No, darling, no; Mamma is going to be a great deal better; run away both of you and play." Then, as the children stood still, reluctantly, the order was repeated peremptorily, and obeyed. He watched them till they reached the end of the walk; so did Katharine. She

felt it would be cowardly to go away and leave a false impression behind her merely because a storm was coming. Yet it was a most uncomfortable moment. Colonel Forbes drew near slowly, his steps were always rather measured, so were his words. He meant them now to be peculiarly emphatic. "May I beg you, Miss Ashton, to be careful what you say to my children? I have no wish they should be frightened unnecessarily." Katharine apologised heartily and simply. She had no expectation, she said, of having her words so taken up by a child, otherwise she should certainly have been more careful. She supposed they must know that their mamma was not well. "Of course, of course," replied Colonel Forbes, impatiently, "no doubt they must; but there can be no need to cause exaggerated alarm. I see a tendency to this in all my household," he continued, in a tone which implied that he was determined to put a stop to it. "It does Mrs. Forbes herself harm. It must be injurious to any one to be continually watching symptoms." A truism which Katharine did not deny; but he went on as if she had wished to dispute the assertion.—"The mind acts upon the body, the body again re-acts upon the mind. That perpetual watching and care must be injurious. I believe that Mrs. Forbes would be much better if her illness were never alluded to in her presence; and it is my wish, my especial request, that it may not be." Katharine quite well knew that this was aimed at her. She was expected to make an answer—an humble one—but she could not bring herself exactly to the point required, and replied with considerable boldness, that she quite felt that in many cases, perhaps in all, it was better for the invalid not to think of the illness; but that it was almost impossible for those who were watching, and therefore were anxious, not occasionally, to show their anxiety.—"If they feel it,—if they have occasion to feel it," repeated Colonel Forbes, hastily; "but I believe myself that it would be much better if they did not feel it. A great deal of this kind of illness is hypochondriac, and perpetual attention increases it. Mrs. Forbes will, I have no doubt, be a great deal better in London."—"Away from you," was implied to Katharine's mind. She felt a little cross, and still more bold. It was rarely she had such an opportunity of speaking out, and she took advantage of it. It was a great comfort, she said, to feel that Mrs. Forbes would have the benefit of Dr. Lowe's advice. All that was to be feared was the excitement of London; she so much required quiet. "In moderation," observed Colonel Forbes, fretfully. "Lowe recommends cheerful society."—"She feels the late hours very

much," said Katharine, her voice almost trembling at her own temerity. — "Mere habit," said Colonel Forbes; "people get into a habit of going to bed at a certain hour, and fancy they can't sit up ten minutes later. But I won't detain you, Miss Ashton, only perhaps you will be good enough to remember my wishes." — Another bow and curtsy, and the disagreeable interview was at an end.

CHAPTER XLVII.

KATHARINE walked home, thinking Colonel Forbes the most cold-hearted, disagreeable of men, and wondering whether, even for his wife's sake, she could ever bring herself to go to Maplestead again.

That was human infirmity; Katharine's temper was not gentle by nature, and she had a good deal to try it. Perhaps her feelings might have been softened if she could have seen the state of Colonel Forbes' mind after she had parted from him.

He did not go to Jane, or play with his children, or even talk to his gardener, but wandered away till he found himself in a distant part of the grounds, in a straight, narrow walk, bordering the park, and entirely shut out from the public view by a thick laurel plantation. There was nothing to please him in it—nothing, that is, but the power of pacing up and down without interruption; but that was a comfort, the motion was regular and lulling, and he required it. He could not have endured to sit still, he could not bear the effort of thought; he shrank from the idea of business. At first he was angry with Katharine, and that made him restless, and then he was cross with Jane, and that added to his disquiet. But it was not anger which caused the weight pressing upon his heart with a load of actual physical oppression. Persons recover from anger—they are able to shake it off, or outward sights and sounds distract them; but this was something which only grew the heavier from every attempt to escape from it. He thought of London,—his parliamentary life,—the friends he was to meet,—the important subjects to be discussed,—the measures to be taken to attain certain long-desired objects. Strange!—but he could not even feel that he cared for them;—he actually could not fix his attention upon them. Ever, as he placed himself by an effort in the position he desired, imagined himself speaking fluently in the House of Commons, addressing

his friends, arguing with his opponents, some secret irresistible power, dragged him away, and he found himself once more walking side by side with Jane in the beech-tree avenue, or sitting with her in her mother's house, listening to the gentle accents which had first captivated his taste, or the words of holiness, which for the time had made him feel himself a better and a wiser man.

Why did those days revert to him now? They had done their work, they had borne their fruit, and now they were numbered with the dead. A busier life lay before him, with its infinite capabilities of enjoyment, its thousand objects of ambition; and he was walking in the midst of the former, straining every nerve to attain the latter; why, then, should his thoughts turn from them as from a banquet, fair to the sight, but for which the appetite is wanting, to recall the buried joys which could never come again?

There lay the secret—in that one word—never; that word which, as by a spell, opens the eyes of the mind to the perception of the treasures we have possessed and disregarded. Whilst Colonel Forbes lived day by day, with Jane near him, to humour his caprices, watch over his comforts, attend to his slightest wishes, forestall the very secret desire of his heart, the past had little in it to regret. He was loved still with the deep, unselfish, unwearied love, which is the choicest and dearest gift a wife can offer, and he was satisfied. But a doubt had been thrown upon the stability of his happiness. He had, it is true, after the first shock, put it from him; he had trodden it beneath the cares of the world, and there were times when he had forgotten its existence; but though he might crush, he could not destroy it. It bore a charmed life, the life of truth, and ever and anon it would start up when least thought of and most unwelcome, to mar his most eager hopes, and dim the lustre of his most brilliant anticipations.

Colonel Forbes was a selfish man; but his selfishness did not necessarily or even naturally render him insensible; rather it in some degree increased the keenness of his feelings. Selfish people may be very soft-hearted, and have great longings for sympathy; and no one could be more keenly alive than Colonel Forbes to any thing like coldness, no one could be more quick in perceiving changes of tone and manner. To hear him talk, it might be supposed that he was often a perfect martyr to the absence of kind feeling in the individuals with whom he was in the habit of associating. But he was one of those persons who expect to receive every thing, but to give nothing in return. Jane was to

live for him—he was to live for his own wishes. And Jane did live for him, and she spoilt him. He saw her giving up her will, bearing contradictions, working beyond her strength, to humour his fancies; and because she never put forth any wishes of her own, he imagined that he never thwarted her. He would have been a monster if he had not been fond of her; unquestionably he was; but it was that fondness which deceives many to their destruction: and if ever, for a passing moment, he was conscious of having been unkind to her, he used to make his love a solace to his conscience, and say to himself, that when he really gave her so much affection, she could have no right to complain of a hasty word. And now he was threatened with the loss of this his choicest treasure, was it in human nature not to suffer? It is not grief which is the test of true or false affection, but the effect of grief. Colonel Forbes' grief made him angry with his wife when she looked ill—with his friends when they noticed it,—with the physician when he warned him of it,—with Katharine when she even gently hinted at it. He thought to escape from trial by acting as if it did not exist. He was taking Jane to London now quite as much to avoid the wretchedness of his own forebodings, by plunging into a press of engagements, as with any hope of her receiving permanent benefit from the advice of Dr. Lowe. In fact, to have made medical advice the permanent object of her removal would have been to realise to himself what he was so bent upon forgetting. Katharine must have pitied, if she had known the trouble of his heart. He had so very little to comfort him. Even when he thought how he had loved Jane, conscience whispered that he had not made her happy; and when it reminded him that he might devote himself to her more fully for the time to come, the miserable, long-indulged habits of selfishness, rose up to make him shrink from the irksome restraint involved in consulting the wishes of another. If all things could only remain as they were—that was his one desire. Life had gone so smoothly with him hitherto—from his childhood he had had every wish gratified—it seemed very hard that change should come. And he had no self-knowledge to show him that it was required. He was a man whose character had always been respected, and whose judgment was considered by many infallible. He was an upright magistrate, a consistent friend, an excellent landlord, a most regular observer of all the outward duties of religion; even more, he never neglected prayers in private, or with his own household. If he had faults, they were, in his own eyes, those of a noble character—pride and hastiness of temper. He did not object to acknowledge these; and sometimes, when in serious moments he

considered it necessary to practise a kind of self-examination, he used to think over any particular instance of these offences; and now and then he would speak of them to Jane, and say how much he regretted them. And she, in the simple confidence of her affection, treasured up these rare confessions in her heart, as proofs of the sincerity which she was always hoping for, and always trying to think she had found.

But his virtues, let them be what they might, could not now save him from suffering. He was very unhappy. That strange, dreary feeling of want of interest in life was something he could not meet or combat with. It was a phantom trial, but even for that very reason the more terrible; and still he would not search into its cause; he would not allow to himself that sorrow was drawing near, that its shadow was even then at his door, but restlessly and impetuously he paced the laurel walk, now venting his anger upon Katharine Ashton's thoughtless folly in filling his children's heads with fancies, and again upbraiding himself for weakness in being so fretted by a word, and striving fruitlessly to turn his mind to the subjects which hitherto had been all sufficient for him.

And in this state of mind Jane found him. It was some distance from the terrace to the laurel walk, and the day was very warm; but she had seen him enter the garden, and fancied he had been looking for her and missed her, and she must therefore, so she said to herself, go and find him; she could not let him worry himself about her. She was repaid, or felt herself so. His face brightened when he saw her, and he made her take his arm, and they went on together. But he still thought more of his own wish to walk than of what she might like. "Are you ready for to-morrow?" he asked kindly and rather anxiously. — "Very nearly, I hope," replied Jane. "There is still some of Dawson's work to be done; she procrastinates terribly." — "We must get rid of her, my dear; I can't let you be worried." — "Katharine Ashton says she will look out for some one to suit me," replied Jane; "and she will know just the kind of maid I want." — "Possibly, my love, but I should have thought you might have done better to wait till we were in town." He did not at all like the mention of Katharine's name; it brought back his unpleasant feelings. Jane, not from thought, but instinct, the result of long habit, checked herself as she was going to say that she would rather rely upon Katharine's judgment than that of any other person she knew. The pause in the conversation made Colonel Forbes look at his wife, and then he perceived that she was evidently tired. He was less restless himself at the moment, so

he proposed that they should sit down for a short time. Jane asked him some questions about his letters, and they began talking as usual upon political subjects. Jane had become a great politician since her husband went into Parliament, and had an opinion upon all points, from free-trade to an embryo railroad. He took out some of his letters to read to her, and she undertook to copy the answers before post time. These things were but trifles, but they were like the genial influence of a fire on a cold day, they roused the feeling which had been benumbed; and cheering himself with his wife's sympathy, Colonel Forbes once again felt happy. And thus they continued to talk for some time, Jane as usual putting her whole heart into her husband's pleasures and wishes, seeing with his eyes, feeling with his feelings; and Colonel Forbes thinking that the comfort he was enjoying was the result of his own good humour and agreeable conversation.

Jane did ask at last whether it was not luncheon time; but Colonel Forbes was not hungry, and he was in the middle of a declaration of his own views upon foreign policy. So the answer given was—"Not quite;" and the dissertation went on. Again, after the lapse of ten minutes, Jane ventured to suggest that luncheon must surely be ready, and again the hint was put aside with the reply, "We will go in a few minutes, my dear!" A third time the effort was made, and the answer was almost angry; and at last, after the delay of half-an-hour, Colonel Forbes, having finished all he had to say, stood up, and Jane tried to follow his example, and fainted away.

Alas! for Colonel Forbes' unstable fabric of happiness! What a trying afternoon followed! so lonely, so anxious and uncomfortable! Jane lying upon the sofa, looking most provokingly ill, and Dawson and the housekeeper making respectful side-thrusts at him, by remarking to each other that Dr. Lowe and Mr. Fowler had both said nothing could be worse for Mrs. Forbes than not having her luncheon at a proper hour in the middle of the day; and all owing, as Colonel Forbes said to himself, to Jane's absurdity in not saying what she wished.

In his own eyes Colonel Forbes was the most injured of men. Jane's illness was the result of her own imprudence; his domestic comfort was sacrificed because she would not take care of herself. He could not make up his mind to sit with her, and read to her, he felt so annoyed; and therefore he shut himself up in his study with a novel, and begged that the children might be kept from playing in the hall because he was not well, and could not bear a noise. He really was not at all well when evening came; for he wanted exercise; and because he had not taken it, he had a bad

headache. Then he went to Jane, and she pitied him, and made him sit down by her sofa, and put eau de Cologne to his forehead; and as she was looking better by that time he did not feel as much irritated as he had done, and had therefore the pleasant consciousness of acting a magnanimous part in forgiving her. Jane would have been glad to have the children with her a little before they went to bed; but Colonel Forbes thought his head would not bear it, and he could not go to his study, for he had been alone all day; but he liked the idea of reading aloud, and chose a new pamphlet containing some remarkable statistics. When he was tired of reading, he recommended Jane to go to bed, and went to his study to write some notes from the statistical pamphlet.—“I am afraid Master’s reading has tired you, Ma’am,” said Dawson, as she came to attend Jane. “A little, perhaps,” replied Jane, smiling; “it is difficult to keep up the attention when one is not quite strong.” Dawson made no more observations; she saw that Mrs. Forbes had had enough talking and thinking for that evening.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JOHN ASHTON did not go to see Colonel Forbes, although Katharine carefully delivered the message. He should be engaged all day—that was his excuse, but Katharine fancied he did not seem thoroughly well pleased with the communication, though in words it implied that his wish, whatever it might be, was to be gratified. Katharine thought less about the matter than she might have done, from finding, on her return home, that her mother was not as well as usual. For some time past Mrs. Ashton had adopted invalid habits, did not get up till late, and never went out except when it was warm and dry, and then only for a short walk; but the change had been very gradual, Katharine herself had scarcely noticed it. This day, however, she found her mother looking pale and worn, and speaking in an irritable tone, which was quite unlike her natural disposition. Lately, especially, Mrs. Ashton had been particularly pleased and contented, except when anxieties for John were forced upon her. Katharine could scarcely help feeling angry when she found that Selina had been pouring a tale of complaints into her mother’s ears, telling her a number of annoying things which Katharine had been trying to keep from her. One of the farm servants had been detected in petty thefts, and a favourite

cow had died, and the best cart-horse was lamed by the carelessness of a carter; and all these and many other grievances had been narrated by Selina to poor Mrs. Ashton, as they sat at work together, principally, as Selina said in excuse to Katharine, to give her some amusement, but not a little, Katharine believed herself, to excite her compassion, since the conversation had ended with a request for some money. It had been granted, of course, and this Mrs. Ashton had to confess, and she felt guilty, for the sum was large, and her yearly income from the shop was still in arrears; but she never now looked beyond the moment, or considered that she might be giving to John what fairly ought to be considered as due to Katharine. Within the last few months, indeed, she had adopted a notion which gave her quite a new interest in her property. Although John had already taken so large a share, she could not give up the wish that he and Katharine should share all that remained; and whenever any uncomfortable misgiving troubled her as to what she was doing in advancing money so largely, she was accustomed to comfort herself by thinking that it was only forestalling what would be poor John's own in a short time, and that it was better to let him have it now that he really wanted it. The idea had never been exactly propounded openly till this day, but when Mrs. Ashton saw the grave face with which, in spite of all Katharine's efforts to the contrary, the communication that fifteen pounds had just been promised to Selina, was received, she could not help bringing it forward as an excuse. "You know, Kitty," she said in a tremulous voice, as Katharine sat down on the window seat and tried to conceal her annoyance, by taking up the false stitches in her mother's knitting, "you know it's only doing with John as your poor father did. He always helped him when things were very pressing, and my belief is that matters could'n't have gone on if he had not."—Katharine saw in a moment what was implied in this remark, and she could not help feeling, that her interests were but little considered in comparison with her brother's. But what could be said? How could she bring forward her advantage in opposition to his?—"The fact is," continued Mrs. Ashton, in the same nervous manner, when she found that Katharine made no answer to her observation, "I have been considering a good deal about all our concerns lately, and I can't help thinking, my dear, that it must be hard for poor John to feel that he is to have little or nothing from me when he is so badly off. I know it was your dear father's notion, that John had had most of his share of the property from the money that was laid out upon the farm and the stock, and that the rest might be for you.

But no one can tell how things will turn out, and times have been very hard lately, and you know he has to take care of Selina and the little ones; and so I think it might be more right to make it share and share alike; and then there can be no unpleasant feeling between you. There is nothing so bad as family disputes about money matters."

So very true this was, that Katharine herself was for a moment puzzled by it, to the extent of thinking she must have been very selfish in her view of the matter. "I wish, dear mother, you would do what you like and think best," she said; "I had rather not talk about it, a great deal."—"That's very good-natured of you, Kate, and very like you; as I was saying to John only yesterday, there's no one ever thinks less of herself than you; and you know, my dear, it will, in fact, be helping to make your home more comfortable; for, of course, John and Selina will always be glad to have you with them."

A vision crossed Katharine's mind of a home of her own. It had come often of late, when the fact of her mother's increasing weakness forced itself upon her; but she would not encourage it now, for it might be her duty, for the children's sake, to remain with her brother, and to live by herself would be very sad and lonely. True, there was another alternative, but that involved a thought more dangerous to her peace of mind, and Katharine kept such strict guard over herself that it was stifled before it arose. Yet she was much perplexed what to say to her mother. Mrs. Ashton evidently expected some reply, which would satisfy her that no objection could be raised to her plan; and Katharine would willingly have given it if possible; but there was a most unfortunate sense of justice in the way, and she could only hurriedly kiss her mother, and beg her not to trouble herself about such things now; no doubt, whatever was settled, all would be right in the end. But Mrs. Ashton was not satisfied, for her conscience was not at rest. She was a very bad reckoner, but she could not avoid a suspicion that the "share and share alike," which was to contribute so largely to the family concord, would, at the same time, diminish Katharine's little fortune in a way which she had never been led to expect. She began to apologise more nervously, in fact, a little angrily. "Of course," she said, "no one can imagine I have any feeling of favour in the case. With only two children I must have the same care for both, but that's what I don't think you feel, Kate; you always were inclined to be jealous, from a baby." Poor Katharine! If this were so, the feeling had been grievously tried, and the fault

science. Often and often in the silence of midnight Katharine knelt by Mrs. Ashton's bed-side, unable to utter words, but finding her only rest in the attitude of prayer ; and many and most fervent were the petitions which ascended to Heaven that her mother might be spared, if but for this time, that her child might prove by the devotion of every moment of her time, and the sacrifice of every other wish of her heart, how entire was her repentance and her love.

And the prayer was in a measure heard, and Mrs. Ashton rose up from her sick bed, the wreck of what she had been, with one side entirely paralysed, and her speech imperfect, yet in the possession of her other faculties, except at intervals, when she showed traces of her illness by the imperfection of her memory. The one thought now at Moorlands was to make her comfortable ; even Selina's selfishness was touched by her helpless state, and now that Mrs. Ashton could no longer interfere in the household affairs, she was willing to do all which she considered lay in her power to render her latter days easy. The all was indeed very little. It included only a kiss, morning and evening, a gossiping half-hour's chat after an afternoon spent in Rilworth, and a little reading aloud when she had nothing else to do. Beyond this, Selina did not feel herself called upon to make sacrifices. She would never stay at home to give Katharine an opportunity of going out, even for a walk, unless it happened to suit her inclinations, and she never would deny herself the pleasure of giving a party, though the visitors were likely to be noisy, and Mrs. Ashton might be disturbed by them. Her taste for gaiety was growing stronger than ever, and a most expensive taste Katharine could not help seeing it was. No wonder that her bills were so high as to oblige her to take money which had been promised elsewhere, and to apply to her mother-in-law for assistance, when every whim of the moment was gratified at whatever cost ; and John, who knew nothing about women's dress, and always supposed that gowns were to be had for about ten shillings apiece, encouraged her extravagance because he liked to see her look handsome.

Katharine was tolerably indifferent to all this. She had long known Selina's character, and could not now be disappointed in it ; and indeed she had not the heart to think about her, or about any one but her mother. Even Jane was only occasionally a cause of anxiety when perhaps a note would arrive saying that she did not find any material benefit from the advice of her London doctor. John was the only person who really helped

Katharine, and he certainly did a great deal, for his feelings were quick, and he was very fond of his mother. He would often come in from his work and sit down by Mrs. Ashton's arm-chair, and arrange her cushions as tenderly as if she had been a little infant, and then in a softened voice inquire what else he could do for her, and tell her any little thing he fancied could interest her. But to watch all this gave Katharine a pang even in the midst of her satisfaction; for she felt then how much there was in him which might have been turned to good if only he had fallen into good hands. But the marriage had been his deliberate choice, and the consequences must rest upon his own head.

He was not happy; Katharine could see that evidently, independently of his anxiety for his mother.

There seemed to be something working in his mind, about which he was unwilling to speak. Private letters came to him frequently, and some of them, Katharine fancied, were in Colonel Forbes' handwriting. Katharine was vexed with herself for feeling so distrustful, whenever this was the case. It seemed an injustice to Jane, and there really was no obvious cause for it. Colonel Forbes had always been a most honourable person in all his dealings. He had been hard, perhaps, with John, and Katharine was sure he did not like him; but he had kept strictly to the letter of his agreement, however much his own inclination might have been opposed to it. It was the secrecy which Katharine dreaded and disliked. John, with all his faults, had hitherto been so open, that she always satisfied herself with feeling that she knew the worst of every thing which was to be known. She could not do that now; and when John sat talking to his mother, Katharine could not help watching him, and listening to him, not from any particular interest in what he was saying, but merely with the painful wish to discover, by some chance word or intimation, what was lurking in the depths of his mind.

It was a monotonous life which Katharine led in this way for several weeks, and there was no change to be anticipated, but that which would make her still more lonely. Her Rilworth friends sometimes came over to see her, but their visits could not be much comfort, because Mrs. Ashton did not like strangers about her, and Katharine could not therefore be with them for any length of time. The Miss Lockes asked her to go and stay with them, for a little change, but that Katharine was obliged to decline, though John urged it strongly, and even made Selina promise that she would take her place as nurse. Katharine knew too well what Selina's promises were worth to heed them, and

she would not even have the subject mentioned to her mother. Still it was a pleasure to feel that John could think for and be anxious about her ; and she went on more cheerfully with her work in consequence. About five weeks after Mrs. Ashton had first been taken ill, Katharine was, however, obliged to go into Rilworth, on a little business for her mother, which no one but herself could well settle. Mrs. Ashton was unwilling to part with her even for that short time, but she happened to be feeling particularly well that day, and Katharine was to go in late, and return early. John proposed to drive her in and out, for he had business in Rilworth, and she was to have luncheon with Mrs. Reeves, so that she would have a little pleasure besides the business.

The change from the sick room to the open air and the bright clear sky, the sight of faces not clouded with care, and the sounds of the active business of life, were all cheering and invigorating. Katharine did not feel in good spirits,—that was impossible—but she seemed to breathe more freely. She was conscious that she had not yet lost the elasticity of mind which had hitherto given her such a keen power of enjoyment, and this discovery is a great help to all who make it. No trial is crushing, so long as we feel that ever so slightly our hearts rebound from its pressure. It is only as life goes on, and youth and hope are deadened, that we become as calmly acquiescent in joy as in sorrow ; and even then, some minds—and Katharine's was of this cast—have a spring of vigour and a power of happiness which, after years of trial, will enable them to rise, as it were, instantaneously, as soon as the least relief is given. Such persons are very pleasant to themselves, as well as to others. Katharine felt as if she had recovered confidence in herself when she found how enjoyable that little drive was, and that she could look forward with real pleasure, and not mere comfort, to the luncheon with Mr. Reeves, and the little talk with Betsey Carter about Rilworth matters. She had but a short time allowed her, for John was to call for her again at four o'clock ; but she had mapped it out most ingeniously, to take in a great deal of business, including two visits in her old district, and a few words with the Miss Ronaldsons. "Half-past twelve ! So we go to Mr. Carter's first, I suppose, Kate," said John, as they stopped at the Rilworth turnpike. "Yes, that will be best ; it will be nearest, and I must have a little talk with Betsey about my mother's business. Where are you going, John ?" His face became a little overcast, and he answered shortly, "A good many ways,—to the shop for one."—

"Ah! the shop!" said Katharine, with a sigh, which, however, was not very mournful; "how I wish we could cut the shop!"—"We need not trouble ourselves to do that," replied John; "it will cut us before long. Henry Madden is such a fool!" Katharine was in a manner recalled from a pleasant dream; but she answered cheerfully, "If it is to be so, don't you think we might do well to take some steps before it comes to the point of cutting?"—"Well, perhaps so," replied John; "only one does not see how it is to be done. Madden has no more ready money than I have; in fact, Kate, I don't think ready money is much the go in England just now, with any one." "Where is it ever the go? as you call it," asked Katharine. "The colonies—Australia—there's the place," said John. "I know three fellows at this moment, who went out with only fifty pounds in their pockets, and by this time have made as many hundreds." "They may have gone out alone," said Katharine; "that makes a great difference. But, however, I don't mean to say that there is not a much greater opening in Australia than in England."—"Only you would not go, if you were in my place, I suppose," said John. He spoke as if his whole heart were in the question. Katharine was much struck with his manner; it opened to her the idea of a more fixed and deliberate plan than she had ever imagined. "I don't know," she replied; "I can't tell what might be right under some circumstances." John bit the top of his driving-whip, and said no more till they reached Mr. Carter's house.

"We meet here again at four o'clock, then," were his parting words, as he drove off, and Katharine promised to be ready. Katharine was shown into a room upstairs, which sometimes was let; a drawing-room prettily furnished, with a few pictures, and some good old-fashioned books. When there were no lodgers in the house, Miss Carter used this as her sitting-room, principally, so she said, to air it. She could never be quite free from pretence, at least in manner, and Katharine always felt as if she had a little something disagreeable to get over when first they met; but Betsey really was sincerely kind, and helped Katharine in a good many difficulties, and gratitude and old acquaintance combined made Katharine willing to bear a great deal. On the present occasion she was contented to be kissed, and told in a drawling voice that she looked charmingly well; and she answered properly all the inquiries after her poor dear mother, and when she had last heard from London, which was Miss Carter's way of implying that she knew Katharine and Mrs.

Forbes to be on terms of the greatest intimacy, and then they proceeded to business. The point under discussion related to the exchange of some old furniture, which Miss Carter had been negotiating for Mrs. Ashton; nothing very important or very interesting, though useful and necessary. It was soon transacted between two straightforward, honest-minded, energetic people; and an engagement was made that Katharine should go with Miss Carter to see the person who was to take it before she left Rilworth; and then, very naturally, Miss Carter proceeded to impart the latest news of the town.

"Mr. George Andrews is going to be married, my dear; have you heard that?" was the first piece of what she called astounding information. Katharine laughed, and said she did not know why it should be so very astounding; the wonder was that he had not been married before.—"Perhaps so, my dear; but it is the case of the *Æsopian* fable of crying 'wolf' too often. You remember that beautiful fable, no doubt. Everybody has said for the last five years that Mr. George Andrews ought to marry."—"And I am sure there were wives enough provided for him," observed Katharine; "Miss Susan Lane, and Miss Madden, and that pretty cousin of Selina's."—"Ah! my dear, yes; but the fact is, there were always difficulties. Some were too aristocratic, and some too plebeian. I always said myself that George Andrews would never be contented with a Rilworth lady, and so he has proved."—"Well!" said Katharine, "I wish you would tell me who the lady is, for I really am curious to know."—"Are you indeed? I call that quite good of you to acknowledge. I believed you were far above such sublunary interests."—"Not in the least," exclaimed Katharine; "nothing amuses me more than to hear all about whom people are going to marry; only please, Betsey, be quick, for it wants only five minutes to one, and Mrs. Reeves lunches at one."—"Oh! you are going there, are you? I could quarrel with you, for I thought you were come expressly to see me. But dear Mrs. Reeves! I can't refuse you to her, she really is so good; and Mr. Reeves too, he did preach such a beautiful sermon on Sunday. I quite wished some friends I know, who find fault with him, had been there to hear it."—"I dare say," said Katharine quickly; "but please, Betsey, leave Mr. Reeves, and just tell me who is to be Mrs. George Andrews, and then I must run away."—"It is such a long story," said Miss Carter, deliberately.—"Then cut it short," said Katharine. "What is the name?"—"Jenkins. That does not help you, my dear."—"Not in the least," replied Katharine; "I don't think I ever was

acquainted with a Jenkins in my life.”—“And these are quite new people,” continued Miss Carter—“strangers entirely. You could not possibly have heard of them, at least till within the last week. The father is at the head of a great Australian land company, or something of that kind, I don’t know exactly the term by which it is designated. The rumour is, he is sent down by Colonel Forbes.”—“Oh!” was all Katharine’s reply. She was engrossed by a faint, dull, glimmering, disagreeable light, which the connection of Colonel Forbes’ name and an Australian land company had thrown upon John’s words and manner. “You see,” continued Miss Carter, “there is a great desire now to people those distant regions of the earth. No doubt we have a large surplus population in Great Britain, and”——“Yes, yes,” interrupted Katharine, not quite catching the meaning of the words; “but it must have been very quick work.”—“Most rapid,” replied Miss Carter, drawing up her head sideways as she always did preparatory to giving out any peculiarly learned piece of information. “I was reading yesterday evening a paper upon the last census. It is said that the rate”——“Of Mr. George Andrews’ courtship was what?” asked Katharine, laughing. “I beg your pardon, Betsey, but I don’t care in the least about the census, and I do care a great deal to know if Mr. George Andrews fell in love after a week’s acquaintance.”—“Katharine, my love, you are too volatile,—too much so a great deal for your age. I heard it remarked the other day, that you looked as if nothing would ever keep down your spirits; and it gives an unfavourable impression. I don’t speak for yourself so much as for Mr. Reeves. It is well known that you are one of his followers.”—“Never, Betsey,” exclaimed Katharine; “I never was anybody’s follower, and never mean to be. But we won’t enter upon that old discussion now; only just tell me, how did he manage it?”—“Now really, Katharine, how can I tell? You should not ask such questions; you really are too bad.”—“I thought you liked questions in natural history,” said Katharine; “and you know the old joke against George Andrews is, that he would never catch a wife, because he was like that great creature—the alligator, is it not?—so long in turning round to look at her.”—“As for that,” replied Miss Carter, a little flattered by this reference to her knowledge of natural history, “I believe the fact is they have been acquainted for months, only he has kept it very close; and she being away, it was not likely to get wind.”—“Then has Mr. George Andrews any thing to do with this great Australian Land Company?” asked Katharine.—“Why that is not precisely known,” replied Miss

Carter, mysteriously. "The fact is, there are a good many reports—what the French call *on dits*—about it. Some say the company is set up by Colonel Forbes, and that he is to make his fortune out of it; of which there seems little enough need, as he has such a large one already. But there is nothing like the love of money—most ensnaring it is."—"Rumours, are they?" interrupted Katharine. "I don't put much faith in rumours; I would rather hear about Miss Jenkins. What is she like?"—"Light hair, rather sandy; grey eyes, a little staring; a good long nose, and very white teeth, only the mouth too wide; fine figure, tall, decidedly aristocratic; altogether likely to be an addition to the Rilworth society, and so far very satisfactory," said Miss Carter.—"I hope she will make herself useful," observed Katharine; "that is the main point. And her father, you say, is very rich, and the head of the Australian Land Company."—"What he is or is not, my dear, nobody exactly seems able to tell, though he has been the talk of Rilworth for the last six days. He is staying at Mr. Andrews'—that I know for certain; and all the young men are wild to buy land and make their fortunes, Henry Madden among them." Katharine could not be accused of being too volatile now; she looked quite thoughtful enough to satisfy even Miss Carter's notion of what was becoming in one of Mr. Reeves' followers. But she did not betray her thoughts, and only replied—in one of those oracular sentences which are such invaluable helps in conversational emergencies—"Well! strange times we live in! Good-bye, Betsey, I will try and be back by a quarter-past two."

CHAPTER L.

KATHARINE went to Mr. Reeves' and had a pleasant hour's conversation, not perhaps quite as amusing as that with Miss Carter, but which sent her back to the duties of life strengthened for whatever might be required of her. That was the great blessing of Mr. Reeves' advice, it was so simply practical. Katharine always felt that he put before her not what might be done under different circumstances, but what she could herself do under her own. And if there was any thing abrupt in his manner, or occasionally chilling, it was in a great measure made up to her by Mrs. Reeves' warmth. They talked a good deal about Moorlands, and not a little about Maplestead. Katharine had not heard from

Jane lately, but Mr. Reeves had received a note from Colonel Forbes that morning, and it had made him rather uneasy. Mrs. Forbes was not quite so well, she had been over-exerting herself, and it had brought on one of her old attacks of faintness, but Colonel Forbes hoped that a little quiet would soon restore her again. "She ought never to have gone to London to put herself in the way of excitement," was Mr. Reeves' comment. — "To be put, my dear, you mean," said Mrs. Reeves; and Katharine, though pained at the news, could not help smiling at the difference in their quickness of perception as to the state of affairs at Maplestead. "We shall have the Colonel down again before long," said Mr. Reeves; "at least, so says the noted Mr. Jenkins, the agent for the great Australian Land Company. I suppose, Katharine, you have heard of Mr. Jenkins?" — "Seeing is better than hearing sometimes," said Mrs. Reeves. "Look, Katharine, he is coming up the street now; that tall man with the bushy red whiskers." — "Walking with George Andrews and young Madden and your brother, is he not?" asked Mr. Reeves, as the party stopped just opposite the window. Katharine looked. John was there, listening deferentially to Mr. Jenkins, who was laying down the law to the great edification apparently of his admiring friends. "The first time I have seen any thing like a friendly spirit between Madden and George Andrews since the days of the famous Union Ball," said Mr. Reeves; "but worldly interests will work wonders. It rather disheartens one when one feels the difficulty of creating a fellow-feeling upon other subjects." — "I don't quite see what the worldly interest is to be in this case," said Mrs. Reeves. "What benefit can Mr. Andrews derive from the Australian Land Company?" — "I may suspect," said Mr. Reeves; "but I am not going to tell, for the chances are I may be wrong; but, Katharine, don't let your brother be carried away by the mania, unless you are thoroughly sure it is a safe one." — "If Colonel Forbes approves, there can scarcely be any great danger as far as the stability of the company is concerned," said Katharine. "He is not a man to be taken in." — "First see that Colonel Forbes does approve," replied Mr. Reeves; "I can't make that out for certain yet, in spite of Mr. Jenkins' asseverations." — "He will carry his point if assertions are of any avail," said Mrs. Reeves, who had been standing silent by the window. "I am convinced he has gained some victory now over your brother, Katharine." Katharine had been watching also from a kind of basilisk fascination, which made her keep her eyes fixed upon the little party. It was as though she were seeing a spell tried

upon her brother, which should bring him into a charmed circle from which he could not escape. "George Andrews talks well," said Mr. Reeves.—"And John cannot talk at all," observed Katharine, very gravely. Mrs. Reeves turned quickly towards her, struck by the change in her voice. "You are afraid of something, Katharine?" she said.—"Am I?" replied Katharine, looking up brightly; and, after a moment's consideration, she added, "Yes, I am afraid. When people join together only from self-interest, how can one help it?"—"The old story," said Mr. Reeves. "Happily the merciful Providence of God overrules self-interest for lasting good."—"Lasting good for the whole, sir," replied Katharine; "but individuals suffer."—"Suffer, because it is good they should suffer, because without suffering, their case would be far worse. But we will not talk in this way, Katharine, merely because Mr. George Andrews is holding forth oracularly to your brother; that would be raising a mountain out of a mole-hill."—"Only straws show which way the current flows," said Katharine. "I dread that Australian current for my mother's sake."—"Then let your mind rest," said Mr. Reeves, cheerfully. "I believe there is a special Providence over the old even as over infants."—"And they are taken away from the evil to come," replied Katharine. There was a pause. Presently Mr. Reeves said, "You will not forget, Katharine, what we have often talked about, the comfort of reading the book of the past when we are tempted to tremble for the future."—"I will try not," was Katharine's answer, spoken with a glistening eye, for her heart was full with the thought of that grievous loss for herself, which yet, it might be, would be the greatest blessing she could desire for her mother.

The business with Betsey Carter was despatched, the visits in the district were paid, and about half-past three o'clock Katharine knocked at Miss Ronaldson's door, and was admitted by Deborah, with the exclamation, "Oh! Miss Ashton, is that you? Well I am glad, to be sure! the ladies are quite ailing and down-hearted for want of a visitor."—"Nothing particular the matter, I hope," said Katharine, as she followed Deborah through the long passage.—"Nothing to be called that, Miss Ashton," replied Deborah, talking as she went on; "but they've had a good deal of care lately. I dare say they'll tell you all about it. Mr. Charles——" They were standing at the parlour door, and the remainder of the sentence about Mr. Charles was lost. Katharine was perhaps a little absent in mind in consequence, but the good old ladies were too delighted to see her to notice it. Miss Ronaldson was feeling

very weak from the effects of an attack of influenza, and Miss Priscilla had forgotten both temper and rheumatism in the anxiety to nurse her. It was a very different kind of nursing from her sister's. There was no entreating, or lamenting; no doubt as to whether what ought to be done would be done. Decided authority on one side; placid, willing submission on the other, made every thing go smoothly. And so, when Katharine entered the room, Miss Priscilla whispered a warning to her sister, "Now don't distress yourself, my dear, keep quiet; it's only Katharine Ashton. Keep quiet, and she'll come and speak to you;" and then she went forward to Katharine with a certain air of dignified graciousness, which seemed to have grown upon her since her authority had been undisputed. "You find me a very poor creature, my dear Katharine," said Miss Ronaldson, holding Katharine's hand, "a very poor creature indeed; but so it is nearly seventy years—" "Seventy your next birthday, my dear," said Miss Priscilla. "Ah! to be sure, Prissy, my dear, seventy my next birthday. It's a good age, Katharine."—"It is indeed," said Katharine, "and I am afraid a good deal of trouble of one kind and another comes with it."—"Ah! my dear, yes, but it would be very wrong in me to complain; with a comfortable home, and kind friends, and a dear good nurse. No, I always think there's something to be enjoyed as long as God thinks fit to keep us here. There mayn't be enough to satisfy some people, but there's a taste I am sure for all, and a good large one for me; and so I thank Him for it;" and the wrinkled hands were clasped together reverently and fervently. "And Rebecca has been a good deal better, till just lately," continued Miss Priscilla; "those drops—Davy's drops,—did her a quantity of good. She has left them off now for about a month or three weeks, but I shall give her some again soon, if I find she does not get on as she ought."—"They were strong drops, my dear," said Miss Ronaldson; "I thought too strong; but Prissy said not, and so I took them, and to be sure they did me a power of good; and now I have given some to Charlie, for he has been ill."—"Very ill!" said Miss Priscilla; "with a terrible fever, so Mrs. Ronaldson writes us word."—"And he's very weak, still, poor fellow," continued Miss Ronaldson; "and no one to nurse him but his mother, and she nearly worn out."—"Ah! you were always a capital nurse, I've heard say, Katharine, my dear."—Katharine, in spite of her uneasiness, could scarcely refrain from a smile at the simple way in which Miss Ronaldson betrayed the connection of her ideas. "I hope Mr. Ronaldson is better now," she said, trying not to show

that she had any interest in the question beyond that of ordinary kindness.—“Well! he is better, my dear,” replied Miss Priscilla; “he has begun to mend ever since he took to Davy’s drops, which is now just a fortnight ago; but he has had a hard struggle, I’ll assure you.”—“And no one to nurse him!” again repeated Miss Ronaldson.—“Hush! sister, remember!” Miss Priscilla’s warning finger was held up as in the olden time, and Miss Ronaldson sank back, obedient, in her chair. “He has done very well in the way of nursing, my dear; he has had his mother to nurse him,—and that’s as much as a young man ought to need. After all, it’s my belief that a mother’s love is more sure than a wife’s; and so I have told him, and warned him that he ought to be thankful he has such a mother.”—“And we may hope he is, my dear,” interrupted Miss Ronaldson. “You see, Katharine, a time of illness like that is a great trial for a young man. It brings him out and shows what he is; not that any one could ever have had any doubt of Charlie who ever knew him. He’s been good from a boy, and when he was ill, my sister writes me word, it was wonderful how he thought of every one; leaving messages, because he thought he was going to die—no one forgotten; all his Rilworth friends remembered—Mr. Reeves and your brother;—and keepsakes.”—“Sister!” Miss Priscilla’s voice was really terrific.—“To be sure, Prissy, you are quite right. I was very wrong in what I was going to say, but Katharine won’t think about it now, because, you see, the book has never been sent.”—“Sister! sister! indeed, Katharine, I beg you won’t think—indeed, sister, you are very wrong!” Miss Priscilla’s agitation was so great that she took out her handkerchief and began to walk up and down the room fanning herself. What Katharine felt was not betrayed except by the paleness of her cheek; but Miss Ronaldson’s distress was not to be calmed.—“Yes, she knew,” she said, “she had done very wrong. The book was not to have been mentioned, and she had never thought of mentioning it, only it slipped out. Not that it ought to have slipped out, Prissy, my dear,” she added; “of course it ought not; of course, Katharine, if it had been Prissy, she never would have said it; but it always was my way to let out things; and you know it isn’t so much to be wondered at. Pray, Prissy, sit down, you will be sure to catch the rheumatism by that open window, and then what will become of us? Oh, dear! oh, dear!” Miss Priscilla drew majestically from the window.—“Miss Priscilla, ma’am, could you be good enough to step into the kitchen?” said Deborah, putting her head in at the doorway.—“Coming, Deborah, my good girl, leave us for the moment,”—and Deborah retired.

"Sister!" said Miss Priscilla, advancing towards the centre of the room, "I have but one more warning to give—let bygones be bygones. Katharine, I shall see you on my return." With a slow and stately step, Miss Priscilla left the room, leaving the awe of her presence behind her. Miss Ronaldson beckoned Katharine to take the chair next her. "She is right, my dear—Prissy is always right, it shouldn't have been said; but 'twas natural, poor fellow! when he was so very ill, thinking he was dying! And a book of prayers, too!—the book he always used. Just like him, that was; so very good! Oh, Katharine, if you could but have said yes! But dear me!"—and Miss Ronaldson looked rather nervously at the door—"what am I thinking of? what will Prissy say? Prissy is quite right, my dear—let bygones be bygones; and we will talk of something else. How has your poor mother been lately?"—"Not quite so well, thank you," was the reply. A simple, straightforward answer, but the tone was so peculiar that Miss Ronaldson turned herself round as quickly as her weakness would allow, and gazed at Katharine's death-like face in alarm.—"Why! what?—I declare, oh dear! what will become of us? Prissy, my dear! Prissy! Deborah! some water. Oh me! oh me! she's quite gone." A violent pull at the bell-rope brought Miss Priscilla and Deborah into the room much more quickly than poor Miss Ronaldson's faint cries for help. Katharine was laid upon the sofa, not quite insensible, but very nearly so, whilst Miss Priscilla, half anxious and half excited, applied salts, and hartshorn, and sal volatile, and ordered all the windows to be opened, and sent for the great Indian fan in the left-hand corner of the upper division of the chestnut bureau; and, in fact, did all that she had ever heard as having been prescribed or imagined for the recovery of persons in what Deborah insisted upon calling "a dead faint." Miss Ronaldson looked on guilty, and most uneasy. Was there any connection between the conversation and the fainting fit?—What had she said?—Was it necessary to confess to Priscilla?—What was there to confess? After all, might it not be the heat?—but then, to be sure, it was not hot; or the walk?—but then Katharine had been seen driving with her brother in the chaise. Deborah suggested the most natural solution of the problem, and Miss Ronaldson's uneasy conscience caught at it eagerly.—"To be sure," said Deborah, "she has been overworking herself with nursing her mother. People who have gone over to Moorlands have said Miss Ashton was looking very ill, and sure enough 'twas time. Poor thing! Poor thing! how she must have fagged!"

There was some truth in Deborah's conjecture. Katharine was

overworked. She was not in a state to bear much excitement, and the day had in one way and another brought a good deal. Perhaps the very fact of the enjoyment she had felt on first leaving Moorlands had brought on a reaction; at any rate, it was better to think this than to suppose herself guilty of a weak loss of self-command; and upon fully recovering her recollection, she eagerly seized upon the assurance which was made her, that she had looked very ill when she came in, and her friends were certain that she had worn herself out with nursing. "It's very clear, to be sure," said Miss Ronaldson, greatly relieved at the turn which public conjecture was taking; "to be sure! it's what all young people do. There's no keeping them within bounds. I have often known Prissy work till she was quite ill; but then Prissy always was a worker. Take a little more wine, my dear, or a little brandy—just a teaspoonful."—"She will have some arrow-root, sister," said Miss Priscilla. "Deborah, a tea-cup of arrow-root, with a teaspoonful of brandy in it, directly." Katharine sat up and caught Miss Priscilla's hand,—“Stop, Deborah! please—indeed, Miss Priscilla, I have had my luncheon—my dinner it was,—at Mr. Reeves'. I could not possibly take it.”—"Some arrow-root, Deborah, made very clear, with two tea-spoonfuls of brandy in it," repeated Miss Priscilla. "Katharine, my dear, lie down. Sister, you can spare her one of your pillows; this sofa-cushion is very hard." Miss Ronaldson would have given up all in an instant; she even suggested whether Katharine had not better go to bed, and she could lie there and sleep most comfortably for the next two hours. It was like listening to a proposal for being buried alive, and Katharine started up and put her feet to the ground; but resistance to Miss Priscilla was quite useless. A gentle push, which Katharine was not just then at all able to stand against, forced her head to sink back upon the sofa, and her two feet were taken up, as if they did not in the least belong to her, and Miss Priscilla then seated herself at the further end of the sofa, and laid her hand upon them, to be quite sure they should not again escape her. Katharine laughed in spite of herself. She was feeling very dizzy and weak, and there was an aching, unresting sense of something painful at her heart, which she could scarcely recall;—yet she laughed, and Miss Priscilla said "hush!" in a warning voice, and Miss Ronaldson entreated her not to let her spirits get the better of her.

Deborah came to the door. "Miss Ashton ready for her arrow-root, ma'am? It's beautiful clear and hot!"—"Bring it in, Deborah, and put it on the round-table, and fetch some tea-

biscuits." Katharine was in despair. She was not fond of arrow-root in her days of strongest health. She took out her watch; "Four o'clock, I declare. It really is so dreadfully late, I must go; — if you would please let me. I am afraid I could not touch the arrow-root, though you are so very good in getting it for me." — "Mr. John's chaise puts up at the 'Bear,'" said Miss Priscilla. "Deborah, put your bonnet on, and run down street to the 'Bear,' and tell the ostler that Mr. John Ashton is to call here for his sister. Make haste, there's a good girl. Now, Katharine!" — Katharine's feet were set free, and Miss Priscilla went to fetch the little round-table, and placed it by the sofa. — "Davy's drops, — what do you say to them, Prissy?" said Miss Ronaldson. "Don't you think they would do her good?" — "Not to-day, sister. She shall take a bottle home with her, and try them to-morrow." There is an indescribably helpless feeling in being thus talked of as a third person, as if one had lost all power of judging for oneself; and Katharine, who was not at all in the habit of fainting, and whose head was still in any thing but a clear state, was quite unable to contend against the pressure of circumstances. There was the arrow-root before her, Miss Priscilla standing beside her, Miss Ronaldson looking at her. The spoon was actually put into her hand, with a complacent "now, my dear!" What could she do but eat? And, curious to say, she was the better for eating; for she had taken nothing at breakfast, and very little more at luncheon; her appetite had been failing her for weeks: and, to Miss Priscilla's complete triumph, Katharine laid down her spoon at last, with — "Thank you, I really do think it has done me good." — "To be sure, my dear," was Miss Priscilla's reply, "you may rely upon it, I shouldn't have made you take it if I hadn't known it would do you good. I am not at all for quacking, or making people eat against their wills, when it's not necessary; but Deborah's arrow-root is very superior, though I say it that shouldn't say it." — "Even poor Charlie allows that," said Miss Ronaldson. "His mother wrote us word that when he was ill he often said he wished he had Deborah to cook for him; but then he's so fond of every thing connected with Rilworth." An impulse of safety made Katharine resolutely stand up and wonder whether the chaise was coming, and go to the glass, which hung over the mantelpiece, to arrange her bonnet. She was shocked at her face; it looked dreadfully old; and the thought crossed her whether those who had known her a year and a half before would recognise her. She had very little personal vanity, at least that she was aware of, but it seemed to have been awakened by that glance, and she

could not escape from it. She longed to ask some person—the Miss Ronaldsons, or any one—whether she really did look so old. Yet, if she had been answered in the negative, it would not have satisfied her; she had seen herself, and that was sufficient. She turned away from the glass ashamed of herself, because her own image haunted her.

It pursued her through the desultory conversation which followed; and the parting good-byes, and words of advice, and messages of remembrance to her mother. It pursued her whilst she talked to her brother as they drove home, though topics were touched upon which at another time might have aroused no slight degree of interest: it never left her even when she went back to her mother to tell her all that she had been doing and saying, and all that every one else had done or said; and it was stamped upon her memory by Selina's last words when they parted for the night:—"Why, Katharine, going into Rilworth has not made you look younger than you did." That speech made Katharine consult her glass again when she went upstairs, and certainly a more haggard face she had seldom seen reflected there. Young? No! she could almost believe that youth was quite gone. She was six-and-twenty,—she would be seven-and-twenty her next birthday,—and formerly she had looked upon seven-and-twenty as old age. Charles Ronaldson was two-and-thirty, but that was still young for a man. Life seemed opening before him, and closing behind her. If they were to meet, he would see her so changed that he must be disappointed, and then naturally his thoughts would turn to some one brighter and gayer than herself. It was distance, doubtless, which kept up his feeling for her, if he really had any; for, after all, his remembering her in that way when he was ill might be only his natural kindness of heart. He was always a clinging, loving person, and he had a special feeling for every thing connected with the remembrance of his childhood and boyhood. It seemed wrong and vain to build upon such a sandy foundation as those few words of Miss Ronaldson's. Yet Katharine did build upon them in spite of herself,—beginning by an intense, longing wish to see the book of prayers; thinking why it should have been chosen for her,—whether it implied that she could feel with him on those subjects; and, if so, whether perhaps such a bond of union would not be dearer to him than any other; and so on, and on, till the dream of happiness became too bright for a mind so chastened to indulge in without fear; and Katharine with a strong effort cast it from her, and knelt to pray that she might be taught to seek only for a heavenly love, and in that to find her rest.

CHAPTER LI.

It was late the next morning when Katharine went down to breakfast, for she was still feeling far from well. John and Selina were together without Mrs. Ashton, and Katharine, when she entered the room, found that she had interrupted a conversation of some private nature. This was an uncomfortable consciousness, and Selina had not sufficient tact to render it less so. She stopped suddenly, looked cross, and said mysteriously, "We will talk about it again by-and-by," and then the children were called, and breakfast began. Katharine tried to make the conversation natural and general, but no one was inclined to talk, for each had a subject for thought which could not be shared. Katharine was ashamed of hers, and longed to forget it, but the little that was said brought it back to her. John had heard of Charles Ronaldson's illness, and spoke even more seriously than the Miss Ronaldsons of the danger he had been in; and Selina, more from curiosity than interest, questioned and cross-questioned, till she brought out not only what John knew, but what other people conjectured. Katharine sat by and said nothing, though she could not help feeling that two pairs of eyes were glancing at her from time to time, as if scanning her countenance. "My mother will be down soon, Kate, I suppose?" said John, as they rose from the breakfast-table. — "Not very soon; she is tired this morning," replied Katharine, "and I persuaded her to keep in bed." John looked a little disconcerted, and Selina said meaningly, "She wouldn't mind your going to her." — "It is not well to disturb her with business too early," said Katharine, quickly. — "No, perhaps not; but I should not keep her long," observed John. — "And she will be more flurried after she has had the trouble of dressing," said Selina. Katharine again repeated that it would be better to wait, unless the business were something very urgent. — "It may be urgent," was John's reply; "but, however, Kate, I can't fuss her if you think it better not." — "I shall just go upstairs and see how she is," said Selina, decidedly; "one can't judge at all what she can bear without seeing her." John faintly begged her to stop, but his wish evidently was that she should go, and she did go; Katharine not daring to prevent her, knowing that the effort would have failed, and would unquestionably have caused a storm.

"Selly is very anxious this morning," was John's observation,

when he was left alone with his sister. "When once she gets a thing into her head, she is full of it till it is settled."—"I thought there was something going on," replied Katharine; "what is it now?"—"Only the old story under a new form," replied John; "you told me that you heard in Rilworth yesterday about the Australian Land Company." Katharine's heart sank. "You are not going to talk to my mother about that project, John?" she exclaimed in alarm.—"Well, no, not about our going, which is the only thing she cares for, but ——" he hesitated; "you know, Kate, it might be a very good investment for her, and so for you too."—"As far as I am concerned I am very well contented with the investment we have already," replied Katharine; "it may not bring in as high an interest as some others, but, humanly speaking, it is perfectly safe."—"So like a woman! not understanding, and thinking only of safety!" replied John; "I wonder you don't insist upon locking your money up in a desk, and taking out only as much as you want from day to day;—that is the only kind of safety women understand; something they can see." Katharine laughed. "Well, I could understand some comfort in that," she said; "at least, one should see, as people say, to the end of one's affairs. But I do wish, John, you would not worry my mother's mind with these matters; she really is not fit to attend to them, and," she added more sadly, "I can't say I think lately she always understands them."—"Now or never," replied John; "Colonel Forbes says that; and you would trust him, Katharine."—"Yes, up to a certain point," said Katharine; "but I should like to know a little more what he has to do with the Company."—"Oh! as to that, nothing in the money way," replied John; "he is not in the least responsible."—"I wish he was," said Katharine.—"Why, how perverse of you!" exclaimed her brother; "I venture to say, that if I had told you he was responsible, you would have been afraid of some secret underhand dealing."—"No, never, never," exclaimed Katharine; "I would trust Colonel Forbes to the very last farthing, if his own honour was engaged. I should be quite certain he would not let any one be misled."—"Then what is it you do doubt?" inquired John.—"Nothing," replied Katharine, "and yet every thing." John turned away hastily. Katharine laid her hand upon his shoulder: "That was a stupid, provoking speech of mine, John; but I always fancy there is some political motive in what Colonel Forbes does."—"Possibly," replied John, drily; "but in this case it happens he does nothing; only the chairman of the company is a great friend of his, and so he

naturally wishes the thing to succeed." — "A great political friend!" said Katharine. "Yes, I suppose so; — I don't know. Colonel Forbes' friends are all political, aren't they?" Katharine smiled. "I never heard of any others," she said; "but you are his political enemy; why does he urge your mixing yourself up with this Land Company?" — "He does not urge it; he only tells me that to buy land in Australia will make our fortune." — "A strong temptation," observed Katharine, "even if it is not direct urging; but John, dear, where is the money to come from?" John was silent. After a few seconds he said, rather sulkily, "Of course, Kate, if you put your face against it, there is nothing more to be said." — "I don't put my face against it, or for it," said Katharine; "but I should like to let well alone, it won't be for very long," she added sadly. Selina just then returned. She had been helping Mrs. Ashton at her breakfast, and putting her room in order, and now she was come to say that John might go up whenever he liked; but John stood irresolute. "Kate thinks it will worry her, Selly," he said. — "Certainly it will just now," observed Katharine; "she never is fit for business so early in the morning." — "She is particularly clear and comfortable this morning," observed Selina; "I never saw her better." — "And Jenkins, the agent, comes over this afternoon," said John, "on purpose to talk over matters." — "And nothing can be done without Mrs. Ashton's consent," said Selina. — "And George Andrews and Madden talked of walking over too," continued John. Katharine's face expressed great surprise. "I did not know it had gone so far as that," she said; "my mother is not in the least prepared for such discussions, and I am sure they will make her ill." John looked at his wife with an air of considerable embarrassment. Selina, too, was for a moment confused, but having less delicacy of feeling than her husband, she was able to take the affairs of life more coolly. "It's no use mincing matters, Kate," she said; "you see it's a question for John as well as for you; and so, of course, he is right, for my sake and the children's, to do what will be best for our interest." — "That is —" interposed John, more gently; but Selina went on quickly: "There must, sooner or later, be a division of the property, Kate, and John wants your mother to let him invest what would be his half now." — "Yes," continued John; "invest it in what will bring in twenty per cent. instead of four, and give her a large income now, and make me by-and-by a rich man, instead of a ruined one." He waited anxiously for Katharine's reply, whilst Selina watched the expression of her face with an

angry curiosity which she could not conceal. But Katharine remained perfectly silent. "I wouldn't have thought of mentioning the thing if it hadn't been necessary," said John. — "For the children's sakes," added Selina. Still silence. "Why don't you speak, Kate?" asked John, reproachfully; "one would think we were doing you a wrong." — "That is my mother's business, John, dear," said Katharine, with a gentle but decided tone, and she turned towards the door. John caught her arm: — "It isn't like you, Kate," he exclaimed; "when you had always put yourself as one with us, and said you were so fond of the children. I thought you would have been only too willing to consent to any thing which would be for their interest." — "Poor little things!" exclaimed Selina, "they will have little enough to look to in life, if they are only to depend upon Katharine." — "That's not true, Selly," observed John, quickly; "Kate would do any thing she could for them if it came to a pinch. But can't you see, Kitty," and he drew nearer to his sister, and spoke rapidly and with a flushed face, which showed an uneasy mind; "can't you see, that, being a father, I am bound to look to what would be good for the children?" — "And when your mother said she wished it to be share and share alike," interrupted Selina, "how were you to turn against her? It would have worried her out of her life." — "We talked it over carefully only two days ago," continued John, "and she told me that you had said you only wanted to have just enough to be independent; and that I knew you would have if the money was put into the Australian Land Company." This new speculation, then, was the salve to John's conscience. Katharine was deeply pained. John watched her countenance with anxiety. "Kate thought to have had it all for herself, and to set up as a fine lady before long, I suppose," exclaimed Selina, with a toss of the head. Katharine turned round quickly, — "I have thought of nothing, Selina, but of making my mother comfortable whilst she lives, and doing whatever God may be pleased to point out afterwards. He knows that, whatever that may be, it will be hard work enough then." Tears gathered in her eyes, and she moved away to hide them. John followed her: "Come, Kitty," he said, kissing her; "don't let us have words about such a matter as this." — "No, indeed, John, we won't," replied Katharine, with a look of excessive distress; "I can't bear it. Please don't think about me, only my mother! If you will just spare her worry, and let her settle every thing as she likes!" — "That won't do, John," said Selina; "Mrs. Ashton is not one to do any thing without Kate's consent." — "I will give my mother my opinion when she asks it, Selina,"

said Katharine.—“But you won’t give it to us,” said John; “that’s not fair, Kitty.”—“I have nothing to give an opinion about yet,” replied Katharine; “you have told me nothing, or next to it; only it is startling to hear of Mr. Andrews and Henry Madden coming over here suddenly, to talk about business which my mother has never heard of.”—“It couldn’t be helped,” said John; “Jenkins, the agent, hurries matters at such a rate, there’s no time for preparing any one; and as for Henry Madden, he has a notion of taking a share in the speculation himself.” More and more complicated the business was becoming; and Katharine thought with terror of her mother’s feeble state of health, whilst something like indignation rose up in her mind at the cruelty of thus disturbing her few remaining days. “You talk of being hurried, John,” she said, “but if your letters to Colonel Forbes have been about this matter, you have been thinking of it a tolerably long time.”—“But he couldn’t do any thing,” interrupted Selina; “it wasn’t till your mother told him for certain, Kate, that he should have half the property, that it was worth while troubling about it; and that wasn’t till two days ago.”—“It was not fixed till then, that is,” said John; “though she had said before she should wish it.”—“It’s my belief that was what was fretting her when she had the stroke,” said Selina. Katharine turned very pale, and sat down. John’s countenance told the reproaches of his conscience. “There will be quite enough for both, Kitty,” he said, seizing upon the grievance which he supposed was rankling in her mind, “if you will only consent to the investment.” Katharine started up:—“Take it all — all, John — do what you will with it, only spare my mother.” John turned to his wife, — “Perhaps it would be better to wait a little, Selly.”—“And lose the opportunity of making twenty per cent., and get deeper into the mire, and at last be ruined,” said Selly. — “She is right there, Kitty,” said John; “the long and short of the matter is, that if somehow or other some of us don’t make some money very soon, we shall all go to the dogs together; and this is the best opportunity that has offered, or will be likely to offer, for many a long day.”—“And if Kate would throw herself into it, instead of putting herself against it, there would be no trouble in the matter,” said Selina. “Mrs. Ashton would do any thing, no matter what, which we all told her was right.”—“I must first see it is right before I say it is,” said Katharine; “but I cannot pretend, John, to interfere between my mother and you; all I beg is, that whatever may be arranged, I may be put

out of the question.”—“And you won’t join,” said John, with a vexed look ; “that was what I had hoped — that we might have made a common cause.”—“I can’t say,” said Katharine, “and I am not called upon to say. I can’t bear talking in this way,” she added ; “it is my mother’s concern, not mine.”—“But you put your face against it.”—“I put my wishes for delay,” said Katharine, “not taking my mother by surprise.”—“It is too late for that,” observed Selina. “Henry Madden comes over this afternoon to talk about giving up the shop, and having a great sale, and embarking every thing in the Land Company.”—“Then he will kill my mother,” said Katharine, with a painful quietness of tone.—“Not if you are with us to help us, Kate,” said John quickly. “After all my mother’s fondness for me, it is you, Kate, she really reckons upon ; and depend upon it she won’t go against you ; and what I thought, and Selly too, was that if you could see things as we do, we might just go to her, and put matters before her generally, not troubling her with any business scarcely, and so get her to consent without difficulty.”—“Impossible!” said Katharine ; “it would be giving advice against my conscience.”—“Pshaw!” exclaimed John, impatiently, “how can conscience have any thing to do with it ? Surely, we have a right to get twenty per cent. for our money, if we can.”—“But we have no right to enter into speculations which may ruin us,” said Katharine.—“Oh ! you women !” exclaimed John, throwing up his hands, despairingly ; “who says it will ruin us ?”—“No one,” replied Katharine ; “all I say is, wait and inquire.”—“But I have inquired ; I have asked every possible question, and so has Colonel Forbes. And Jenkins, the agent, has come down on purpose to forward the scheme, and George Andrews enters into it heart and soul. Where on earth can the danger be ?”—“Very possibly, nowhere,” said Katharine.—“And yet you won’t help us,” said Selina, angrily.—“Certainly not, till I know more.”—“But if you were to know more ; if you were to be quite, absolutely certain it would all turn out well, would you venture then ?”—“I would wait,” said Katharine, “because I should think it wrong to run the risk of troubling my mother with business.” John tossed into the air a stick with which he was playing, and exclaimed, with an impatient laugh, “Then it’s all a mere waste of words !”—“As far as I am concerned,” said Katharine ; “but, as I said before, I cannot interfere with any plan of yours, John, if you think it right.”—“I don’t understand,” said John, “what you mean by right. Is there any thing wrong in getting twenty per cent. if you can ?”—“Ask her, rather,” interrupted Selina,

"whether, under any circumstances, she would join herself." Katharine hesitated a moment, then she replied, frankly, "I don't think that is a question for me to consider now. It is quite enough that I cannot possibly find it in my heart to trouble my mother. We all know that she cannot, humanly speaking, be spared to us very long, and I would rather not be the one to turn her thoughts to this world's cares, when there is only one thing which she need really think of."—"Very satisfactory!" said Selina; "one might be sure that Kate would always have a good excuse for putting herself on what she thinks the safe side." Katharine did not reply, but the feeling of injustice was very hard to bear. "I don't see what is to be done," observed John, moodily. A thought of delay, and consequent relief, suddenly struck Katharine. She paused, hesitated, and then said, quickly, "Will ten days make any great difference?"—"Henry Madden comes over this afternoon," replied Selina.—"But we can't, indeed we can't, have things hurried in this way, John," exclaimed Katharine; "if the plan were ever so good, it would not be right." John considered a little, and replied, looking doubtfully at Selina, "I suppose ten days would not so very much matter."—"If it all falls to the ground it won't be my fault, remember," said Selina. Katharine did not notice the interruption. "Wait but ten days, John, dear," she said, earnestly, "and then I promise either to consider the plan well, if it should seem good; or, if not, to show you reasons which I believe will satisfy you that I am right in objecting. Any thing to save my mother," she added.—"Yes, any thing to save her," repeated John, his face brightening up; "and you know very well, Kitty, that if you join with us, there will be no discussion and no trouble."

He kissed his sister affectionately, and Katharine, though feeling that she had bound herself hastily by a promise which she might find it difficult to keep, thanked him cordially. Selina stood by, twisting her watch ribbon, and appearing any thing but pleased.—"Cheer up, Selly," said John, good-humouredly, "ten days will soon be gone."—"And what is to come at the end?" was Selina's reply.

A question which only time could answer, yet which Katharine was obliged to put to herself immediately. Yet she had little leisure for thought all the morning. Mrs. Ashton was to be attended to, and soothed, and made comfortable, after having been fidgeted by waiting a long time in her room, expecting John,—who was called away to the farm, and could not go to her after

all ; then the children were to be taught their lessons, and a good many little household matters were to be attended to ; and at one o'clock they all dined, and at four the post went out, and before that Katharine must decide whether or not she could make up her mind to write the letter which in a moment of eagerness she had fancied would help her out of all her difficulties — a very simple letter — to Charles Ronaldson, to ask him to make inquiries about the Australian Land Company, and send her his opinion the very earliest day possible.

Strange it was, that the idea of sending this letter should excite such a tumult in Katharine's mind. The day before she would have written it, not without some feeling of peculiar interest, yet with such comparative indifference that she would not have considered the question twice. Now, something seemed to whisper to her that perhaps she was wrong, perhaps she had a double motive. The sight of the well-known handwriting would be so cheering, and a letter all to herself, though only upon business, would be such a great treasure ! Then, too, she might hear from himself how he really was ; and deep down in her heart there was a secret anxiety which added tenfold to all her other cares. But the greater the temptation, the more Katharine shrank from yielding to it. Again and again she made up her mind to write, and then reverted to the former doubts and self-questionings. Post-time drew near, she had but half an hour to spare ; the delay of a day might be of great consequence. Reason told her that she was doing nothing but what was perfectly simple and right, and she sat down, and took a pen in her hand ; feeling whispered that she had two motives, and she threw it aside. But reason gained the victory. Katharine's simple-minded integrity of heart was a great assistance to her judgment. She was very much needing advice, and Charles Ronaldson was the only person who could give it. This was, after all, the true state of the question, and Katharine at length scolded herself for her irresolution, and without allowing herself any further time for consideration, wrote her request ; but it was a short, abrupt one. —

“ My dear Mr. Ronaldson, — I am writing in great haste, and must trust to your kindness to excuse the trouble I am giving you, but I have a very great wish to learn every particular possible about an Australian Land Company, which has been lately formed. The office is at 44, Bridge Street, Westminster. All you can tell me as to its object and stability I shall be most thankful for. May I beg you to make inquiry about it directly, and let me know

immediately? All beg to be kindly remembered. — Very truly yours,

“KATHARINE ASHTON.

“P.S. We are very sorry to hear you have been so ill, and hope you are better. Pray give my kind regards to Mrs. Ronaldson.”

Katharine read over the note twice, and was tempted to look at it a third time; but that would have been too silly. A taper was lighted, the letter sealed, and sent; and she went to read to her mother, and to try and forget that four days at least must elapse before she could receive an answer.

CHAPTER LII.

RATHER more than a fortnight from that time, Colonel Forbes was sitting at breakfast alone, in a luxurious dining-room in Eaton Place; a sheet of the *Times* lay before him. He was studying the parliamentary debates, especially his own speeches. There was great interest in seeing his own words caught, as it were, and returned to him in a new and improved form,—for certainly the regular sentences which flowed so easily from the pen of the reporter, were by no means as smooth and fluent when spoken by himself. He was not a very eloquent man; he had not quick feeling enough to be carried away by enthusiasm, and his ideas were not sufficiently large to give him much influence as a leader; but he was a safe, hard-working partisan, and when he chose to give himself the trouble, could collect and master a great deal of important information, which, after being well prepared beforehand, was often brought out in a lucid if not a very striking form. In fact he was a useful person, and useful people are far more likely than geniuses to gain permanent influence.

Colonel Forbes was much happier in London than in the country; he felt his own value there, and this was essential to him. Besides, he had less time for thought. If worried at home, he could go to his club; if tormented by little domestic cares, he could escape from them into the wider circle of politics. He liked London as much as Jane disliked it. The difference between them was that, when Jane longed for the country, she tried the more

heartily to be reconciled to London; but when Colonel Forbes longed for London he took pains to exaggerate the evils of the country. He was looking very placid that morning as he reclined in his easy chair, occasionally sipping a cup of most fragrant coffee, and indulging in the flavour of a French *paté*. He did not miss Jane, for her being there would have been a call upon him for conversation, and he was not in the humour for it. Jane never made her appearance at breakfast now; indeed she was seldom out of her room till eleven o'clock. But this was not to be wondered at, London hours were so late, and Colonel Forbes was always having company at home, which she was expected to entertain, or urging her to go out, and so obliging her to sit up beyond her usual hours of rest. The alteration in her habits, therefore, was not much noticed. Colonel Forbes was waited upon by his own man, he could not bear to have any one else about him; and Crewe was his very image and shadow, having lived with him till he had acquired his master's accent, peculiarities of expression, and even his very walk and turn of the head. He fitted to Colonel Forbes, and told by his very look to whom he belonged as plainly as a cap or a bonnet which is acknowledged at once to be "so like such an one." Crewe knew exactly when to leave his master to himself, and when to pay him little attentions. He had learned the degree of favour to bestow upon each individual visitor, the amount of hope which could be afforded to every urgent petitioner. He acted like the hands of the clock to mark the movements of the hidden pendulum; and it required no long acquaintance with the master and the servant to calculate from the manner of the one what were likely to be the inclinations of the other.

Crewe did not stay in the room with Colonel Forbes this morning, he saw that he wished to be alone; but he looked in upon him from time to time and replenished the fire and gave a gentle push to a plate of hot toast which it seemed was likely to be forgotten, and then vanished again, with a slow, noiseless, solemn step, and that same air of grave thought which Colonel Forbes had habitually acquired since he devoted himself to the intricacies of parliamentary life. "Any one waiting for me, Crewe?" said Colonel Forbes, looking up from the newspaper.—"A young man in the back hall, sir; and Mr. Davis, the wine-merchant, in the little waiting-room; and another person, Miss Ashton, from the country, in the housekeeper's room." Crewe hesitated a little in giving this last piece of information, he knew that it would not be agreeable. "Mrs. Brown has taken care of Miss Ashton, sir. She said she could wait very well."—"From the country did you say?"

inquired the Colonel.—“Came up last night, sir, and lodging with a cousin in Great Russell Street, and going down again directly ; only wishing to see you, sir.”—“Me ! Mrs. Forbes you mean.”—“No, sir, you, so she says ; but Mrs. Brown is looking after her ; she will wait very well.” Colonel Forbes was reading, or pretending to read the newspaper still, and Crewe stood without even a look of impatience for some seconds, and then left the room. Colonel Forbes rose and stood with his back to the fire. A number of indistinct thoughts were crowding upon his mind, which he did not try to separate. Some were of parliamentary matters—some of more personal interest. They did not happen to cross his will, and yet his mind was troubled. He hated the name of Ashton, and he tried not to think of it. He thought he would see Mr. Davis, the wine-merchant, and the young man in the back hall, and settle their business first. What did it signify to him that Crewe had said Miss Ashton was come up from the country to see him ? He rang the bell, and Cr we answered it. “Crewe, beg Mr. Davis to wait for me a few minutes, and show Miss Ashton to my study.” The very reverse order from that which he had the moment before intended to give, but impatience was his master.

“Miss Ashton ! sir.”—Crewe threw open the study-door very wide, alarmingly so, but it had no effect upon Katharine. She came forward in her habitual quiet, self-possessed manner, curtsied, and sat down unawed by the piles of blue books and packets of letters and papers covering the library table, and bespeaking more plainly than words the importance of him to whom they belonged.

Colonel Forbes sat down also. Katharine put up her veil, her hand trembled a little, that was her only sign of nervousness ; but she was very pale, and thin, and worn, and there was a dim, dark look about her eyes, which seemed to tell of sleepless nights, and days of haunting thought. Colonel Forbes’ expectant manner, the slightly bent attitude, and irritable motion of the hand, saying as clearly as action could, “I have a great press of business upon my hands, pray make haste,” would have been very trying to any one. If he would only have said “I hope you are not tired with your journey !” or, “How have you left all at home ?” But no, Katharine was one of those persons to whom he never vouchsafed more words than were absolutely necessary. So she began, “I am sorry to trouble you, sir ; I am afraid you are very much engaged.”—“Oh ! not at all, not at all,” the tone meaning just the reverse of the words. “It is about my brother’s business, sir, if I might just ask a question.” “Certainly,” and the listening attitude was

more marked, but no help was given. Katharine was growing so nervous, that her ideas were fast falling into confusion; she made an effort to recover herself, however, and said at once, "Perhaps, sir, you would be good enough to give me your opinion of the Australian Land Company, which my brother—that is Mr. Jenkins—which I think, sir, you have something to do with." Colonel Forbes leant back in his chair, and looked relieved: "The Australian Land Company! let me think; ah yes, I remember. Jenkins is the agent."—"There is a Mr. Jenkins at Rilworth, now, sir," said Katharine, anxiously.—"Indeed! the same man, no doubt. The Australian Land Company! Your brother wrote to me about it. He thinks of going out, I believe."—"I don't know. I hope not, sir," said Katharine.—Colonel Forbes' tone was impatient. "He couldn't do better, depend upon it, Miss Ashton. A capital opening for a young man, a fine field for adventure. He will do very wisely to go."—"He only talks of buying land now as a speculation," said Katharine.—"Indeed!" and Colonel Forbes' countenance fell; "then I misunderstood him, but I suppose he will go ultimately."—"I don't know, sir. He would be glad, at least I should be," she added, correcting herself, "if we could be quite sure this company is safe."—"Ah! an important question. There are a great many speculations in these days. Jenkins will tell you more about it than I can. Your brother has written several times to ask me some particulars, and I made Jenkins send him all the papers; I am sorry they were not satisfactory."—"My brother says they are so," said Katharine.—"I am glad to hear that. Jenkins is patronised by a friend of mine; no doubt he is an honest fellow, he will give you every possible information. If you like to have a note of introduction to him"—Colonel Forbes began to write, but Katharine interrupted him. "I would not trouble you for that, sir, my brother knows Mr. Jenkins; only perhaps you can tell me something yourself."—"Very little, I am afraid. It is not my province. I would recommend you to go to the chairman."—Katharine looked very blank. "It was the opinion of a friend, sir, which I wanted, not of one of the company."—"No doubt, very natural. I trust you will find some one able to assist you, but it is quite out of my power. Can I help you in any other way?" Colonel Forbes stood up, and Katharine felt obliged to rise also.—"I shall be very glad to assist your brother, I assure you, in any other way," said Colonel Forbes, patronisingly. "Land in Australia is becoming extremely valuable; I have no doubt he will succeed there; it is a capital investment of money. Good morning. I hope all your

family are well." The bell was rung for Crewe to open the door, and show Miss Ashton out. Katharine felt angry and bewildered. She paused, trying to recollect why she had come, what questions she meant to have asked. But there stood Colonel Forbes, looking at her, and Crewe holding the door open for her; there was no alternative but to do what both evidently wished her to do. "Crewe, ask Mr. Davis to walk up," said Colonel Forbes.—"Yes, sir;" and Crewe hurried Katharine away, knowing by the tone of his master's voice that the sooner she was gone the better.

"Par ici, s'il vous plait, mademoiselle." Katharine was stopped in the hall by a smart French lady's maid, with eager black eyes, and crisp black curls, wearing a dark green silk dress, fitting so perfectly that it was a marvel whether she could ever take it off, and an ornament of white lace and pink ribbon at the back of her head, styled by courtesy a cap, and speaking in a shrill scraping tone which had almost the effect of setting the teeth on edge. Miss Richardson's French had not been Parisian, and Katharine had heard but little of it such as it was; yet she had sufficient acquaintance with the language to understand that she was to follow her new acquaintance, whose interruption was clearly not liked by Crewe. In fact there was a sudden halt, and they confronted each other for a moment, as if about to have a war of words, but Crewe's discretion got the better of his valour, and with a most stately bow to Katharine, which would have rivalled that of Colonel Forbes himself, he yielded her reluctantly to the guidance of Mademoiselle Laurette. "Par ici, mademoiselle, par ici," exclaimed Laurette, from time to time, as she flitted before Katharine up the staircase. "Madame is quite ready. Madame is a little indisposed. Madame will be quite charmed." She did not even pause to knock at the door of the dressing-room, but threw it open with overpowering noise, and in her shrillest and most jarring tone, announced the name of Miss Ashton. Jane started up from the sofa on which she had been lying, with an exclamation of delight, but sank back again immediately. "Eau-de-Cologne, Vinaigre aromatique, Essence de lavande," ejaculated Laurette, standing in the middle of the room, and clapping her hands. "Ah! la pauvre madame, la pauvre! la pauvre!" Katharine went up to the sofa to give Jane her bottle of salts, then sitting down beside her, said, "Dear Mrs. Forbes, I hope I have not done wrong in asking to see you." Jane smiled. "Wrong, dear Katharine? What should I have thought if you had not asked! There is not much the matter, only I have been ill again." "Laurette," and she turned to the maid, "you can go." Laurette

scowled, and did not move. "If I want you I will send for you," repeated Jane. Laurette still retained her position for a few seconds, then muttered between her teeth, "*Comme madame veut*," and departed.

Jane moved to the arm-chair, but her limbs trembled very much, and Katharine saw that the hand which she stretched out to support herself was painfully thin. "You are not as well as you were at Maplestead, I am afraid, dear Mrs. Forbes," said Katharine.—"Not quite, perhaps, but don't talk about me, you look so ill yourself."—"My illness is chiefly worry," said Katharine; "there is nothing otherwise amiss."—"Is it about home matters? Won't you tell me?" said Jane.—"Perhaps I ought not," was Katharine's reply, "it is such a long story."—"You are come up to London on business, I suppose," said Jane.—"I came up to see Colonel Forbes," replied Katharine.—"To see Philip! and you never told me, and has he helped you?" Jane's face brightened as she asked the question, and her eyes became quite brilliant. "He would have helped me, I dare say, if he could," replied Katharine, and Jane's momentary look of pleasure was gone.—"He is very busy," she observed in a tone of apology.—"It was only a question about an Australian Land Company," said Katharine; "perhaps I might just as well have written it; but letters don't always explain things well," she added, attempting a smile, which ended in a quivering of the lip.—"You are not going to Australia!" exclaimed Jane, in an accent of alarm.—"I hope not; certainly not if I can help it; but I don't know what we are all going to do."—"But your mother?" continued Jane, in the same tone. "She is travelling fast to a far better land," said Katharine; "she has had another paralytic stroke." There was scarcely a change in her voice, but her eyes were glassy with tears. "I am going back to her to-night," she continued; "that is, if possible. I may be kept till to-morrow."—"Poor child!" said Jane; she held her hand fondly, but she could attempt no other comfort.—"I will tell you about it, if I may," continued Katharine; "that will save you the trouble of asking questions. My brother wanted to buy land in Australia, but he had no money, only the hope of any thing my mother might give. He talked to me about it, and I was afraid, and begged him to wait. I did not like my mother to be worried, and I wanted to ask a friend's opinion," her voice trembled, and she paused to recover herself. "My sister-in-law urged the matter very much, but at last, they both consented to wait for ten days, and I wrote, but I did not receive an answer."—"Not till after the ten days," said

Jane, trying to help her, for she spoke with great difficulty.—“It was only two days over,” said Katharine; “but they would not wait; that is, John would not have cared, only people hurried him so, Mr. Andrews, and Henry Madden, and others.—Selina and they went to my mother”—poor Katharine’s composure quite gave way. “I told them how it would be,” she continued impetuously; “Selina knew my mother could not bear business, and now they say it is my fault. Perhaps it was, perhaps I ought to have given in; I know I am obstinate, and Selina says I had an eye to my own interests. Perhaps I had; I know I am selfish, I know I can’t bear risks; she might never have had the stroke, if there had not been all the arguments which worried her. If I had joined with them, she would have trusted, and taken it all quietly, for she did not understand much about it, and she would have taken my word. But I felt so they were wrong, and I could not help saying it, and my mother was confused, and I am afraid we were all irritated, and——oh! it was very terrible.” Katharine buried her face in her hands and groaned in the anguish of her heart.—“But she will understand about it all, when she comes to herself again, dear Katharine,” said Jane, gently. Katharine looked up with a ghastly smile, and repeated incredulously, the word “when.”—“I suppose she is better now?” said Jane, “or you would not have left her.”—“She does not know any one,” said Katharine; “but Mr. Fowler says she may linger for weeks.”—“And you came to consult Colonel Forbes?” inquired Jane.—“I was driven to it,” said Katharine, speaking in a tone so deep and husky, that Jane would scarcely have recognised it. “The constant discussions were so bad for us all; John means no harm, he is urged on by others. He knows how soon all there is must be his and mine, and people are offering to advance money if he will make up his mind, and he says if I will promise to join with him every thing will prosper.”—“But you have your friend’s judgment to fall back upon,” said Jane.—“It was no opinion,” replied Katharine, with a quietness which was unnatural. “It was merely a formal note from a kind of clerk, saying my business should be attended to. I cannot write again.”—“And what does Colonel Forbes say?”—“Nothing.” Katharine’s tone was despairing. “I will talk to him, I will ask him,” began Jane; and then she checked herself and added, “I would if I imagined it could be of any use; but he thinks it right to be very cautious in giving his opinion.”—“People have not been cautious in using his name,” said Katharine, bitterly. “It was that which has caught every one. Mr. Andrews made John believe at first, that Colonel

Forbes was the chairman of the company.”—“And has he nothing to do with it?” inquired Jane.—“He is the friend of the chairman,” said Katharine, “and he sent John some papers; I don’t think there can be any other connection; but he does not say much, and I could not ask him much.” Jane was silent. She knew too well what that impenetrable manner was which her husband could put on when in the least out of humour. “Then what do you mean to do?” she inquired—“I don’t know—go back again as soon as I can.”—“And what do they want you to do?”—“Promise to go shares with John in his speculation,” said Katharine.—“But you will not consent?”—“I don’t mean to do so; but it is very difficult to say no.”—“And you would have to go with them to Australia?” said Jane.—“John never says he is going,” replied Katharine; “but I am sure it will come to that by-and-by. What he says now is that the investment is much better than any thing in England, and he wants to put the whole concern into Henry Madden’s hands in some way, and for him to give up the shop, and for them to be as it were partners.”—“It might answer, I suppose,” said Jane.—“Yes, if we were quite sure this company was safe, and if Henry Madden was not selfish and John was more prudent; but I distrust it all; I can’t help it. And it is so very dreadful to have to think about it now, when I feel what the plan has brought upon us already. If they would only have let it rest for the time! It could not have been a long delay. But that is done,” she added with a heavy sigh.—“And what is to be done next is the thing to be considered,” said Jane. “I do hope, Katharine, you won’t run any risk; it may be the ruin of them all if you do.”—“That is what I think,” said Katharine. “If John’s plans should fail, they will none of them have any one to look to for help but me.”—“But, my dear Katharine, any little fortune which you may have will only be sufficient for yourself; it cannot help them.”—“I have health and strength,” said Katharine, “and I can work. But I cannot bear to look on; and, dear Mrs. Forbes, I ought not to do so; I ought to trust that when the time comes I shall be shown what I ought to do. The worst is,” she continued, “to be talking of all this when the money is not ours, and when it must be such misery for it to be ours; but it is not John’s doing, he never would be so unfeeling. Oh! the marriage!”—“She is not altered from what she was as a girl,” said Jane.—“No; but please we won’t talk about her; I never let myself do it if I can help it. I don’t think I have any thing more to say, so perhaps I ought to go.”—“Not yet,” said Jane;

"you know I have not seen you for such a long time."—"And I have heard nothing about you," replied Katharine; "though I need not ask, I am sure London does not agree with you."—"London might, but the life does not," said Jane, "the late hours are so bad."—"I thought Dr. Lowe forbade them," observed Katharine. Jane smiled. "Yes, he forbids, but who follows a doctor's advice precisely? I can't say no, when Philip asks me to go out."—"But you cannot possibly be strong enough," said Katharine. "I should think you could not even sit up and talk at home."—"That is because you see me early in the day," replied Jane. "You don't know what I am when I am made up for the afternoon and evening." Katharine became very grave. "Dear Mrs. Forbes," she said, "is it right?" Jane was silent. "May I say what I really think?" continued Katharine. — Jane's smile was inexpressibly sweet: "Yes, surely, as in the old school days."—"When I was always so blunt," said Katharine, thoughtfully. She paused for an instant, then the words, "Is it not deceit?" escaped her, as it were involuntarily. Jane looked pained for a moment; but not in the least annoyed. "I hope not," she said; "I do not mean it to be."—"But it may be, though you don't mean it, and by-and-by Colonel Forbes——" "He knows the risk," exclaimed Jane.—"I could not bear it if he did not. But, Katharine, men do not feel as women do about these things."—"Some men do," rose to Katharine's lips; but she said nothing. —"They have so many important things to think of," continued Jane; "at least I am sure Philip has. It would not be natural for him to be always thinking of me, and I can't fret him with all my changes of headache, and sideache, and heartache; and one day is so like another he cannot understand whether I am getting better or worse; it is all very natural."—"Dr. Lowe ought to tell him," exclaimed Katharine with some indignation in her manner.—"Dr. Lowe does tell him," replied Jane gently; "he did the other day when I was ill with one of my bad attacks; and then he became very unhappy, and shut himself up in his room, and I did not see him the whole day, he was so miserable. But he was forced to go out again to the House, or to attend to some other business, and seeing me look much as I did before, he can't understand now that there is much amiss. Indeed it's all very natural." Katharine could scarcely refrain a smile at the earnestness with which this was said, as if Jane's whole happiness depended upon exculpating her husband from all blame in Katharine's eyes.—"And it is not only the going out and seeing so many people which is trying," continued Jane, endeavouring

to turn the conversation into a different channel; "but domestic affairs are so worrying, so much more so than they ought to be. Laurette tries my temper terribly."—"I should think so," said Katharine, heartily.—Jane laughed. "You would not bear with her a single day."—"Not a single hour," said Katharine.—"Well! perhaps I would not if I could help it; but if you could imagine what the difficulty is of getting a trustworthy maid! you know I have had experience,—and Laurette is really very straightforward."—"I should be afraid it was her only virtue," said Katharine.—"It is the largest, certainly," replied Jane; "and I mean to part with her as soon as I can find any one else to suit me."—"I should like to offer myself," said Katharine, quietly. Jane laughed again. "Colonel Forbes would not like me," said Katharine, "that would be one great objection."—"And I should not like you," said Jane, more seriously, as she observed the expression of Katharine's face. "My maid! impossible!"—"Not impossible, I hope," said Katharine, "if I had no other claim—but—" she rose from her seat—"I shall go home to-night, if I can. Perhaps, dear Mrs. Forbes, you would try and let me know a little oftener how you are. If it were only one line, it would be a comfort."—"A month more and we hope to be at Maplestead," said Jane; "then there will be no need of letters."—"A month's change and chances! what will they bring?" said Katharine, sadly. Jane read in a moment the direction of her thoughts. "God will support you, dear Katharine," she said, "whatever you may have to bear." Katharine could not answer. "How one values that prayer," continued Jane, "for His gracious and ready help; ready means so entirely what one is always wanting,—help without delay."

Katharine turned aside her head to conceal the bursting tears. "Do you remember our last conversation?" continued Jane; "I hope it did me good. At least I have learnt to wish that I may have no wishes; and now I would preach the same sermon to you." Katharine took her hand affectionately. "Dear Mrs. Forbes," she said, "will you believe that if I have wishes they are more for you than my mother. She has seen all the happiness that life can give her."—"Do not wish for me, Katharine," replied Jane, earnestly, "or do not tell me so, lest I should begin to wish again myself. The day I saw you at Maplestead," she continued, "it seemed that it would be impossible ever to conquer the constant restlessness and longing for certainty and happiness for others as well as for myself; but my life here has been good for me in that way; every thing has been so put out of my power, the children

and my husband, and all the home matters I was interested in; I have had nothing to do but to learn acquiescence in all things.” —“Not in want of care for your health,” exclaimed Katharine, quickly. Jane looked deeply pained. She did not speak for some seconds, then raising her eyes to Katharine’s face, she said slowly, “We cannot alter the character and the tastes which God has given.” —“But we need not give in to them,” said Katharine, hesitatingly, “when the consequences will be so terrible.” —“So I have said to myself many times,” continued Jane, her pale face flushed with the effort at unreserve which she was making; “and, Katharine, I have done all I could — all that a woman can do — but even for myself, it is worse to oppose than to yield, it frets me more. And to know I had thwarted my husband, and that if it were to please God to take me, I should be remembered only as having always opposed his will — I could not bear it.” — Katharine was silent. “You do not agree with me,” said Jane. — “I do not think such a state of things ought to be,” replied Katharine. — “Who is to help it?” Another pause, interrupted by a knock at the door, and the entrance of Laurette: Monsieur le Colonel wished to know if Madame was alone? Jane became nervously flurried in a moment. Katharine could see the rapid pulsation in her throat. “Good-bye! dear Mrs. Forbes,” she said quickly. — “Good-bye! dear, dear Katharine;” but Jane’s eyes were fixed upon the door. “You will write to me, and tell me every thing. God bless you.” — “And you, too, dear Mrs. Forbes. Oh! if I could but help you!” — “Kiss me, please,” said Jane, and Katharine bent down, and with a fond reverential affection pressed her lips to Jane’s forehead, and then hastened away.

CHAPTER LIII.

KATHARINE’s friend in Great Russell-street was a cousin of her mother’s, the wife of a linendraper. They did not often meet, but occasionally in the old times, when Mrs. Davis required country air, she had spent a month at Rilworth, and in return Mr. Ashton made Great Russell-street his head-quarters whenever business called him to London. Katharine was not sorry to find herself standing again at her cousin’s door, in this comparatively quiet street, after having been rattled through the neighbourhood of Piccadilly in an omnibus, and left to find the rest of her way

on foot from Oxford-street. Great Russell-street was home in its way; she had been there several times before, and it was the beginning of those regions of dull respectability amongst which "unprotected females" can wander without fear. Her cousin's house was just opposite the British Museum, and the sentinel standing before the gateway assumed, in her eyes, the character of a solemn domestic watchman. In her childish visits to London, Katharine had believed that he was placed there as an especial mark of favour to her cousins, and never could quite divest herself of the impression that there was some peculiar safety attached to his tall fur cap and raised musket.

She hailed his appearance now, however, principally as a signal of rest, for both body and mind were exhausted. Refreshment for the former was easily to be had. The good-humoured portly dame who answered to the name of Cousin Hannah, piqued herself upon the way in which she did the honours of her very comfortable house; and Katharine, as she entered the passage, was greeted with, "Well, Kate, so you are come back, are you? You must have had a fice, long, dusty walk; and there's a Bath cheese waiting for you up stairs, and some Scotch ale—excellent Scotch ale as ever you tasted, or porter, if you like it better. What! not drink porter?" she added, replying to Katharine's look, rather than her words. "You would not say that long if you lived in London; but never mind, come up stairs; dinner won't be ready for this two hours."—"I will wait for dinner, please, Cousin Hannah," said Katharine.—"Trust me for that! Why, they'll say we've been starving you. You look as pale as a ghost; and there is a great deal to be done in sight-seeing before you go back."—"Not much, I am afraid," replied Katharine; "for I must certainly return this evening."—"Must! that's a word for the Queen, not for you," said Mrs. Davis, good-humouredly. "Why, you can't if you wish it. There's been a gentleman here to see you on business, and I told him we meant to keep you here; and as he was going out of town for this day and next, he told me to tell you he would call the day after." Katharine's heart gave a sudden bound, and, stopping half-way up the rather dark staircase, she inquired if the gentleman had left his name. "No; and I did not think he looked as if he would like to be asked. But there's a note for you up stairs; first go up and take off your things, and then you shall have it." Katharine hesitated. "No, no; not now," said Mrs. Davis, laughing. "I shan't have you down for the next half-hour if I have it now; and I'm dying to hear how you got on in

your walk, and what you've seen." Katharine felt herself weak, but she could not make up her mind to show any interest in the note, though nothing would have been more simple than to say that, as it was probably upon business, she would be glad to have it at once. Conscience made her a coward, and she allowed herself to be sent up stairs like a child, and even came down again, and talked upon different subjects for some minutes, before she ventured to ask, taking up a little note lying upon the mantel-piece, whether that was what the gentleman had left. "To be sure," said Mrs. Davis; "and you were dying of curiosity to look at it before. Oh, Kate! Kate! as if you could deceive me!"—"It is not a very important document," said Katharine, glancing over it. "Mr. Ronaldson merely hopes that I shall not do any thing in the business which brought me to town till I have seen him. You have heard of Mr. Ronaldson, Cousin Hannah. He has been a good friend to us in many cases of difficulty."—"Oh, that's it;" and Mrs. Davis looked quite disappointed that there was no greater mystery. "And he's coming again the day after to-morrow, is he?"—"He hopes to do so," said Katharine, re-opening the note, and trying to conceal the keen sense of disappointment at having missed him.—"Well! then you must eat something to keep up your spirits till he does come," said Mrs. Davis. "Here, now, I venture to say you have not tasted a better cheese since the one I sent your poor father eight years ago." Katharine shrank from the recollection thus brought back to her, and, cutting a little piece of bread, said she would have that, if she might, and a glass of wine, and then she would go upstairs again, if her cousin did not mind, for her head was aching rather, with the noise of the omnibus. "That's because you are not used to it. If you would just stay a month with us, you'd think no more of an omnibus than of a light chaise; but it is always the case with you folks down in the country; you aren't fit to move when you come up first, and then you fuss, and fume, and get ill, and say you can't live here. I venture to say, now," she added, almost angrily, "you'll be for staying at home this afternoon, instead of making the most of your time, like a sensible girl."—"I had meant to go back by the late train, thank you, Cousin Hannah," said Katharine, in a tone which, though she tried to keep it calm, betrayed extreme worry of mind. "Back this evening! why you are mad, Kate! a girl like you!"—"Not so much of a girl," interrupted Katharine, with a smile; "six-and-twenty is not so very young."—"You may be six hundred for ought I know," exclaimed Mrs. Davis; "but I know I nursed

you when you were in long clothes, and I am not going to let you travel about by yourself at night in that fashion. Husband wouldn't hear of it; so just don't think about it, but take a bit of cheese and a glass of beer, and then go up to your room and rest, if you will, till dinner, and after that we'll talk about what is to be done in the way of sight-seeing."—"Thank you very much, but you must let me think about it, please, cousin," said Katharine, decidedly.—"Think! oh, yes! think as much as you please, only don't take it into your head to be travelling about the country at night. You've got your box taken up, and I'll come presently to help unpack it."—"Or pack the carpet-bag again," said Katharine, quietly.—"Oh, Kate, what a perverse child you always were!" said Mrs. Davis, shaking her head; "don't I remember so well how your poor mother wanted you to sing a song one day, just as you were beginning to speak, and how you would stand up and say, 'How doth the little busy bee!'"—"I don't mean to be perverse now, Cousin Hannah," replied Katharine, gently; "but I can't really decide any thing yet, and my head aches very much."—"Ah! I thought how it would be when you went out this morning. And then you have told me nothing about your visit; how you found Mrs. Forbes, and whether it's true that she and the Colonel don't hit it off; for that's what Betsy Carter wrote me word from Rilworth." Poor Katharine! this was the climax. Yet she had sufficient command to check the outburst of indignation which rose to her lips, and merely saying, "Please call me, Cousin Hannah, when dinner is ready," she walked out of the room.

A very dull apartment that was of Katharine's, in spite of all the attempts at comfortable furniture; a front attic, the small windows veiled by dingy muslin blinds, over which might be seen the roofs and chimneys of innumerable smoke-dried houses. Mrs. Davis was a good housekeeper, and neat in all her habits; but, as she frequently said, what could ever stand against London "blacks?" certainly not Katharine's bedroom. There were scattered blacks upon the counterpane, blacks upon the uncovered boards of the floor, and upon the carpet round the bed; blacks also upon the cloth on the dressing-table, and a whole army upon the discoloured mantelpiece; and when Katharine looked in the glass, blacks had formed a settlement upon her forehead, and when she poured some water into the washing-basin, blacks floated merrily about on the water. Oh! for a taste of the pure water from the springs at Moorlands, and a rush of the free, cool air from among the beech-trees at Maplestead! It may be very

weak to be affected by such trifles; but it is human nature. Katharine was just then too worn in spirits to be able to endure petty evils quite patiently; she threw up the window with a sense of disgust, and leant out of it, longing to catch a glimpse of the blue sky, that she might forget, for a passing moment, dirt, and noise, and misery, and the claims of whirling, anxious, unceasing care, which so oppressed her whenever she was in London, and calmly, in the presence of the Infinite Love which was her shield in the haunts of men, as amidst the lonely beauty of nature, think over her present and her future duties. She had suffered very much within the last few weeks; far more than she had expressed to Jane, or could even venture now to recall. Terrible were the recollections of her mother's illness, but far worse was the thought of that family discord which had now made its entrance among them, under such painful circumstances. And all to be attributed to her! That was the accusation now constantly sounded in her ears, by Selina from anger, by John from weakness. And Katharine had borne all silently; she had gone to no one for sympathy, not even Mr. Reeves. The idea that on her mother's death-bed the little property she had to leave was to prove a source of disunion to her children was so intensely galling, that Katharine would have borne any amount of suffering rather than make it known. She had done all she could; she had asked for advice which, it seemed, would be the wisest she could obtain, and at the very moment when it appeared most needed it had been denied her. It was a harassing, haunting thought. There had been moments when it almost tempted her to distrust the Mercy which was guiding the events of her life; and even when the weak doubt had been battled with and conquered, it left her a prey to a heart-sickness which was far worse than any positive pain. Katharine had believed that her short, business-like note would have brought an immediate reply from Charles Ronaldson, and, with him to help them, she felt that every thing would be well. If he approved of John's plans, her own mind would be at rest; if he disapproved, she could not but think that his influence would suffice to induce her brother to relinquish them. This she had allowed to herself, but there was yet something behind, a hope unacknowledged, that perhaps if he were well enough he would come himself; and day after day, as the post failed to bring an answer to her letter, she had reckoned the chances of his arriving by the evening train, or travelling by night, and reaching Rilworth early in the morning, saying to herself at the same time, that it was very improbable, but still it

might be. Thus she kept him in her thoughts, and looked to him for comfort in a degree which grievously increased the disappointment as time went by and she heard nothing. At the end of a week she wrote a second time, still as formally as before, and, whilst yet expecting a reply, she entreated her brother to wait before he opened the business to her mother; but John was by this time under influence directly opposed to hers; and, urged by his wife and by persons interested in the speculation, he insisted upon keeping to the first agreement.

The result!—Katharine could not venture to recall it in detail, but it was stamped upon her memory in characters which no time could efface. And she had not been blameless, her temper had failed once. She had spoken harshly, exaggerated the risk, foretold consequences which, after all, might be only the coinage of her own brain; and the consciousness of her weakness and her sin had met her, as it were, face to face over her mother's dying bed; for Mrs. Ashton was dying, though by lingering degrees. There was no hope of her rallying and regaining strength, scarcely even of recovering consciousness. Two days after that terrible morning when her mother had a second time been carried senseless to her bed, the answer for which Katharine had so anxiously looked, as at least affording an opening of escape from her perplexities, arrived. She had described it to Mrs. Forbes—a note from a kind of clerk, saying that her business should be attended to. And this, then, was the end of her trust in Charles Ronaldson's willingness to help!—The delay of a week, when she had begged urgently for an immediate answer; and a letter not written by himself, but put into the hands of a clerk.

Poor Katharine! she knew then what the vision was which she had conjured up. The feeling of neglect, of disappointment, was maddening. In the bitterness of wounded pride she allowed herself to believe that it would be wrong to force her affairs upon his notice when he seemed to take so little interest in them; and when again urged by her brother to give a promise which should bind her to enter into his plans, she had taken the sudden resolution of coming herself to London for one day, to consult Colonel Forbes. It was more for John's sake than her own. She believed him to be still unpledged, though his friends were putting temptation in his way; and Henry Madden, especially, was every day at Moorlands, insisting upon the advantages to be gained by the speculation. Katharine had nothing to bring against it but her own misgivings. The very fact that George Andrews, opposed to her brother as he was in politics, should support it, awoke a

doubt; and she could not argue, as John did, that because Colonel Forbes hoped it might answer, and used smooth words about the chairman, and spoke of his respect for his estimable friend Mr. Andrews, therefore every thing was safe; Colonel Forbes would be only too well pleased to rid himself of John Ashton as a tenant, that Katharine knew quite well. Yet she felt certain he would not do any thing dishonourable, and she believed that if questions of fact were asked, they would receive an honest answer. With this belief she went, not to consult, but to inquire. The object of her visit had failed, but now there was hope still. The little note from Charles Ronaldson might be the means of settling all the discordant opinions. Alas, for Katharine! the comfort had come too late to restore her peace of mind. If he had cared for her, so she said to herself when she began to think, there would have been no delay, and her mother's misery might have been saved. Goaded and bitter were her thoughts whilst she sat by the open window, gazing upon the people passing below. Where is loneliness so lonely as in London? On they went, rushing, hurrying, one after the other,—self-complacent ease, busy respectability, harassing care, abject poverty,—each with its own peculiar aim, each with the burden of its own thoughts,—each, as it seemed, using the mighty city and its gigantic resources, not as an end, but as a means for attaining it. And so there could be no rest, and little sympathy, at least on the surface; and Katharine, as she looked upon them, felt that she also had been caught in the vortex, and, like them, was being borne along by the current of the world's business—to what haven?

That was the sad question. Others, doubtless, had homes to which they were hastening,—loved friends to whom, when escaped from the turmoil in which they were moving, they might return and find a sweet repose; but Katharine's home was breaking up. A few weeks,—it could scarcely be more,—and the one tie which yet bound her to the joyous days of her childhood would be broken; she would have no one pressing duty, there would be no one to whom she was necessary. And what was to replace that one object—her mother's comfort—which had for so many years been the rule by which she had measured all other claims? When left to choose for herself where she would go, what she would do, for what purpose she would live, how was she to decide? It was a dreary blank which spread before her. A few months before she might have said, that wherever her brother went there would be her home likewise; but circumstances were much changed since then. Hard words, and cold looks, and un-

just accusations, separate more widely than any outward circumstances. Katharine might and would have forgiven readily, for she had done little wrong ; but Selina's estrangement was of a different character. She who had in reality been the offender was the least likely to forgive ; and John, weak by nature, and rendered intensely irritable, as weak people always are, by a well-grounded opposition, had suffered himself to say things which he could not expect Katharine to forget, and which, therefore, he never forgot himself. Both were cool to her ; and, whatever might be the future of their lives, Katharine saw plainly that hers could not be united with them. Her father's words again recurred to her,—she was to be the children's friend. That could not be now ; and the tears, which had been scorched by the weariness of a deeper sorrow, coursed each other down Katharine's cheek, as she thought how, if she left Moorlands, she should miss the fond caresses and soft words of the little ones whom for so many months she had been training, as she hoped, for Heaven.

But there was nothing definite in all this ; one thought followed the other irregularly. Katharine could not have borne any thing like a fixed consideration of the possible future ; for there was a dark gulf between it and the present moment, watching, and sorrow, and desolation of the heart, and what she might feel, or how she might be enabled to act when actually left to the loneliness which now she dreaded, who could say ? She turned again to Charles Ronaldson's note ; not exactly from interest, though it did interest her ; and after a few seconds she found herself retracing the lines, to see whether there were any signs of weakness, or the remains of illness, in the formation of the letters ; but principally, as she thought, to consider what was to be done about it. To miss seeing him again might be throwing away the best, if not the only opportunity she would have of actually talking to him and explaining all her difficulties ; yet to remain absent from her mother so long was a risk which she could not bear to think of.

Should she ask him to come to Moorlands ? Pride whispered no ; common sense suggested yes. If they were nothing to each other, there could be no reason against it. But then perhaps he might not be able to come ; whereas, if she were to stay, she would be certain, humanly speaking, to see him. Her mother might become worse ; but then also she might not, and Mr. Fowler had given it as his decided opinion that she was likely to linger for weeks. Still, to leave her, and to find perhaps that

Selina had neglected her,—that would be very miserable; but then, again, to discover that if she had only remained, she might have heard something to influence John and perhaps save him from a false and irremediable step! It was a great perplexity. Katharine could only solve it as she had long been accustomed to solve all questions of difficulty, whether involving things of earth or Heaven,—by prayer. And it was not till then that she saw clearly the few rules which in former days she had given herself for guidance in similar cases. One was always, if possible, to keep to an engagement when once made; that decidedly put the balance in favour of departure. She had promised to return, and John and Selina would be expecting her. Another was, in all cases, to choose a *positive* before a *possible* duty. She would certainly be doing right in going back to her mother without delay,—she might only be doing right in waiting to see Charles Ronaldson; and when Katharine had settled these points to the satisfaction of her conscience, she felt, by the sharp though quickly subdued pang of regret which followed, how much, in spite of all pride and disappointment, inclination might have influenced her decision to the contrary.

She went down stairs again to tell her cousin what she had resolved upon, feeling that the communication might not be agreeable, yet still not quite prepared for the outburst of reproachful entreaties which awaited her.—To think of going back the same afternoon! Such a thing had never been heard of in former days. And what on earth could have induced her to come up, if she wasn't going to stay one night? Mrs. Davis, in her disappointment, could almost have found it in her heart to say, that it was giving a great deal of trouble for nothing; but her good-natured hospitality stood in the way as a check. She contented herself with giving her husband a summons to dinner, in a loud, domestic key, which doubtless was well understood by the meek little man, who immediately answered it; rushing into the room, stumbling over a footstool, nearly upsetting a chair in his near-sighted haste, and putting his face into such close contact with the dishes on the table, in order to see what they contained, that it almost seemed as if, in his delight at the meeting, he was about to favour them with an embrace. "There's no need for that, husband," said Mrs. Davis, approaching the table. "Here's Katharine won't eat, nor drink, nor see any thing. We'd as well be without a dinner for any good it will be to her."—"Not quite, I hope," said Katharine, good humouredly; "I mean to make a very good dinner, if you don't object, for it is a long time since

breakfast.”—“Very true, quite true, Cousin Kate. Draw your chair in; and then, Mrs. Davis, we’ll just ask a blessing and begin.” Mrs. Davis tried to look moody; but it was a very difficult matter, most especially when sitting at the head of her own table doing the honours of some very fine soles,—such soles, as she declared, as never were to be had anywhere out of London, and which she had bought herself that very morning. Mr. Davis suggested that, if there were any more to be procured of the same kind, Katharine might have a basket made up for her to carry home.—“To be sure she might; that is, if she would only have waited,” was his wife’s reply. “There’s nothing that can’t be had nor done in London, if people will only give time; but how is one to manage when they are off before one has time to look round? Kate’s in such a hurry, I venture to say she’ll be wanting to go before the train.”—“Not quite, cousin,” said Katharine, laughing. “Indeed, I wished to go back by the latest train, because of having some shopping to do; and I meant to ask you, if you had an hour to spare, whether you could have gone out with me, for I was not able to do any thing this morning.”

Shopping! almost as great a delight to Mrs. Davis as sight-showing; but her pride would not allow her to acknowledge it.

She put sundry difficulties in the way, and especially objected to the idea of Katharine’s returning to Rilworth so late. “There is a train at seven,” said Katharine.—“Too late,” observed Mr. Davis, gravely. “If you were my child, Cousin Kate, you shouldn’t go.”—“If she had been your child, she would never have thought of going,” said Mrs. Davis. “She would have been brought up differently.”—“I shall be at Rilworth by nine,” said Katharine.—“And what are you to do when you get there?” inquired Mrs. Davis.—“John will be there,” replied Katharine; “I told him I might be back by any train after four, so you see he will be on the look-out for me.”—“All a chance,” said Mrs. Davis. “I know John of old; he will make sure you are coming by the first train, and when he finds you are not there, he’ll put himself in a fuss, and go back to Moorlands; and you’ll find no one at the station to meet you; and it will be pitch dark; and the chances are, not a fly to be had, for there’s few enough at any time at Rilworth station; and it will be sure to rain cats and dogs, for it’s been threatening for it all day; and then you’ll run about after your luggage, and never find it, and two to one but you’ll lose it all; or if you get it, you’ll have to walk into Rilworth—and a good quarter of a mile that is—in a pouring

rain; and the end will be, you'll be drenched through and through, and sit in your wet things, and catch your death of cold."—"You'd much better stay, Cousin Kate," said Mr. Davis, who had been listening most dutifully to his wife's prophecies. Katharine shook her head. "We must be back here by six, I suppose," she said; "and I can have a cab to take me to the station." Mrs. Davis rang the bell: "Jenny, there's to be tea ready at half-past five, not a bit later; remember that, Kate." And she rose from table, adding, "Such a flurry as it all is!" But as Katharine felt it more wise to consider all this as an "aside," she went upstairs to finish packing her little carpet-bag, and prepare for going out; whilst Mrs. Davis, grumbling all the time, adjourned to the kitchen, to order something "nice" for Katharine's tea, and provide a little basket of dainties, which she fancied might please the children, if they were of no use to any one else.

CHAPTER LIV.

KATHARINE came in from her walk, very tired, about five o'clock. She was not allowed to stay longer, because, as Mrs. Davis said, there would be no time left for tea. Then she had to write a note to Charles Ronaldson; which, happily, she had no leisure to think about, and so it flowed fluently and easily; it merely expressed, however, that she was sorry she could not see him, and that she should like to hear from him as to her brother's business. In the postscript there was the hint—"If you should come to Moorlands, we should all be very glad to see you." This was all she ventured to say, and little though it was, it opened a door which gave her in the distance a gleam of something like comfort. Then came tea, and the necessity of talking and eating, and precisely at half-past six the cab was at the door, and Mr. Davis ready to accompany her to the Paddington station. Many were Cousin Hannah's parting injunctions, given with a kind of surly good-nature, as to the care she was to take of herself, and how she was to be sure and wrap herself up, because the nights grew cold, and especially not to forget to see after the little hamper, and send it back whenever there was an opportunity; and to remember and let her hear about her poor dear mother. And Mr. Davis was made to repeat twice over the number of parcels. And at last, just as Katharine was stepping into the cab, her

little hand-basket was taken from her, and a piece of cake, wrapped up carefully in white paper, was put into it, that she might be quite sure to have something by her, whatever might happen.

They were early at the station; and Katharine, not liking to keep Mr. Davis, took her place as soon as she could in the railway carriage with a woman who looked like a respectable nurse, and two or three men—all very civil. The carriage was only half-filled; but she did not expect that comfort to last very long. "The hamper's in the van behind, Cousin Kate," said Mr. Davis; "you won't forget? and the little bag you've got with you."—"Yes, all right, thank you very much," said Katharine.—"And wife bade me be sure and tell you not to trust to the railway people, but to have an eye to the hamper yourself."—"Yes, you may be quite sure of that."—"Well, then, good-bye, and a pleasant journey to you, and a longer stay next time."—"Good-bye, and a great many thanks." Katharine shook hands cordially, watched him till he was out of sight, and then, with the prospect of only silent companionship, felt herself at last able to rest.

The train was late in starting, and it was a long one, and rather slow; the evening, too, was cloudy, evidently, as Cousin Hannah had prophesied, threatening for rain. It seemed to grow dark uncommonly soon; or perhaps the indistinctness, and confusion, and rapid succession of all objects on a railway, tended to give the impression. Katharine was so tired, that she became very sleepy, and nothing but the knowledge that if she did not take care of herself no one would do so for her, or warn her when she arrived at her journey's end, would have enabled her to keep even moderately awake. As it was, she managed to have a most remarkable blending of images in her mental vision; smoking engines and railway porters, Mr. Davis and Cousin Hannah, Colonel Forbes and Jane, with the addition of Crewe and Laurette, forming a species of kaleidoscope, from the review of which she occasionally started up as a stentorian voice called out the names of the different stations, in those marvellous tones peculiar to all railways, whether foreign or English, and which seem to have it peculiarly for their object to perplex and mislead the traveller.

"Room here, sir. Three seats vacant." The face of a railway porter was seen by the glimmering light of a lamp peering into the carriage. A man wrapped in a travelling cloak was behind him. The door was opened. Katharine was at the other extremity of the carriage, and the person next to her pressed nearer, to make room for the new comer. Katharine was too

sleepy to look or move; she did not know whether one, or two, or three persons had entered; all she wished was not to be disturbed herself. But this was not to be granted; again and again the carriage-door opened, and the ominous words "Room, sir," were repeated. Every place was soon occupied; and Katharine, jolted, and squeezed into the smallest space possible, was thoroughly awakened by discomfort. "We are likely to have a bad night, sir," said a stout man at the farther end of the carriage, addressing his neighbour in the cloak who sat opposite to him, on the same side with Katharine. "I am afraid so," was the simple reply; and as Katharine caught the words, she bent eagerly forward, and the words "Oh! Mr. Ronaldson," which escaped her, were lost in the shriek of the railway whistle. The train started noisily and rapidly, for there had been an unusual delay; the few lamps at the station were left rapidly behind; and a crescent moon, appearing at times between fast-flying, angry clouds, was the only light cast upon the surrounding country. Katharine leant back in her seat, her heart faint with disappointment and nervousness. The moment she had spoken the words she felt that she must have been mistaken, it could not have been Charles Ronaldson. She listened again—but a mania for conversation had filled the carriage, and all voices were raised except the one which she longed to hear. Then she sat as far forward as she could, and strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the face half-hidden by the collar of the cloak; but in the faint light it was impossible to distinguish it, and at last, in a sudden pause, she heard some one say, "Do you travel far, sir?" The answer was lost, but the rejoinder was spoken more loudly. "I envy you having to go such a short way, we are rather too many for comfort." Katharine felt as if she could bear this no longer. The thought crossed her mind, whether she could ask if it really was Mr. Ronaldson. She was sure he would be as anxious to see her, as she was to see him; putting aside every other consideration, it might save him so much trouble. But the dread of making an awkward mistake held her back. Again the train stopped, there were a few moments of comparative silence, and Katharine, with a feeling of desperation, said as loudly as she could to her opposite neighbour, "Can you tell whether it is raining?" The manœuvre succeeded; her voice caught attention, as she hoped it might, and stretching across his fellow-travellers, Charles Ronaldson exclaimed in surprise, "Miss Ashton, can it possibly be you?" In another minute, notwithstanding the murmuring complaints of the pushed and disturbed individuals, whom

he insisted so unceremoniously should just allow him to pass, he was seated next to Katharine. The relief was indescribable, yet as the light from the lamps at the station fell upon his face, Katharine could not help seeing how ill he still looked. He would listen, however, to no question about himself, his whole thought was for her. "You have left London notwithstanding my note," he said, half-reproachfully.—"Yes, I was obliged, my mother is so ill," replied Katharine; "you have heard that, I suppose?" "No, indeed, I have heard nothing; I have been away in Wales, in Ireland, all kinds of places. It cannot be any thing serious, or you would not have left her."—"Another paralytic stroke," said Katharine, quietly; "I was obliged to leave her for one day." "Another! how terrible! Just now?"—"No, some days ago! she has rallied; but it is very sad, I can't tell you more, unless we have time." He took out his watch: "Ten minutes only! I am obliged to stop at the next station. Was my note any good to you?"—"A little, thank you, but I want to hear more. Is the company unsafe?"—"I could not say that; it is a speculation; it may answer to some, if they have capital and prudence. It will not be safe for John and Henry Madden, they want a wiser head."—"And it would not be safe for me to risk any thing?" said Katharine.—"No, certainly not."—"Thank you;" there was a pause, Katharine's heart was very full. She longed to say, "Why did you not write?" She thought she would ask him to come to Moorlands; she would have given worlds to hear him say how he felt, where he was going, when they would meet again; but she said nothing. And the train rushed on in the darkness, and the precious minutes fled past with yet more terrible swiftmess. Already they were half gone. He spoke again; "You did not think me unkind in not writing?"—"Not very—that is, I know I was unreasonable, you have so many more pressing claims."—"Not before your business. Impossible! Did you really think so?"—"I did not understand, and I was dreadfully anxious and unhappy," said Katharine.—He repeated the words; "Anxious and unhappy! you did not say so."—"I did not like to do so; it did not alter the business, perhaps it was foolish in me." He put his hand to his forehead, and a heavy sigh escaped him. "I was away," he said. "The first letter was misdirected." Katharine started, the idea of such a possibility had never crossed her mind, yet she had sent it very hastily. Charles continued. "It reached me after the second; that too followed me to several places, and was at last sent back to my home. There it was

opened by mistake, and my clerk wrote an answer. You said you were unhappy?"—"Yes, but I would rather not think of it," replied Katharine; "and I am not unhappy now, at least, not in the same way." There was something in the tone in which this was said, that betrayed more of Katharine's real feelings than she was at all aware of, and Charles took up her words, and said in a low, eager voice, "Not in the same way! Did you really then care so much?"—"A great deal depended upon my hearing. I could not help caring." Katharine became very confused, and the train stopped. "You get out here, I think, sir," said a stout gentleman, anxious to free his legs from the "durance vile" in which they had been placed in such crowded company. Charles put his hand upon the door; but turned again to Katharine, and speaking in the same tone, heard only by her, said, "I have told you little about business; shall I write?"—"Yes, to John, that will do most good." He looked very blank. "You have not forgiven me, I see."—"Forgiven you—oh, yes, twenty times over, if there was any thing to forgive." Still he seemed dissatisfied; he made a few more inquiries for her mother, and then jumped out of the carriage, but lingered by the door-way; Katharine's hand rested there, and, as it seemed almost involuntarily, his was laid upon it. There was a slight movement, as if she would have drawn back, yet the impulse was not followed. He looked at her for an instant fixedly, in the glimmering light; his face was pale with agitation. "Miss Ashton, Katharine," and he bent forward, and his voice sank to a whisper, "may I see you at Moorlands?" Katharine's eyes met his, and then they sank again. It was a scarcely audible, "Yes;" but he heard it, and with one quick tremulous, "Thank you from my heart," they parted.

CHAPTER LV.

FOUR more days of painful discussion—contradictory arguments—harsh accusations, mingled with watching which never slumbered, and exertion which never dared grow weary; and on the morning that succeeded, Katharine knew that a brief interval of consciousness had been restored to her mother, in preparation, as it seemed, for that long last sleep which was to bring her to rest for ever. The change had come rapidly and unexpectedly, after a disturbed night, in which Katharine had felt well nigh exhausted. What

it portended she too well knew, but even with that knowledge it was full of a peaceful refreshment to her spirits; for her mother lay like a weary child, simple, humble, and trusting; all the bitterness of the past forgotten, its memory blotted out, and the love which had blessed her children from their infancy, pouring itself forth again in the fulness of its gentle tenderness. Those were hours of great peace, when Katharine sat by the bedside, her hand clasped in her mother's, speaking to her as she could bear it, from time to time, in the words of Scripture, and occasionally reverting to her few earthly cares for herself, or John, or the children,—or hearing the assurances, so often repeated, yet ever new in their comfort, that she had herself been her mother's blessing on earth, and the instrument to lead her to heaven. But dearer yet was the holy service in which all joined as evening drew near, and the consciousness that the prayers which were breathed so audibly by dying lips were those which now for many years had been the secret, daily petitions of comparative health. If Katharine had ever been inclined to murmur at the painful circumstances which had preceded her mother's illness, she felt now that all was abundantly repaid. The peace of Mrs. Ashton's last moments shed its influence over those which followed, and when towards the dawn of the following morning she breathed her last, her children turned with one consent from the kiss laid on the cold marble forehead to the warm living embrace, in which, for the time, every angry word was forgotten. And there was a peaceful week succeeding—most mournful indeed, and at times unspeakably desolate; yet with much to soften its bitterness, even to Katharine. Business was never reverted to, and scarcely thought of, and even the reading of Mrs. Ashton's will did not, as Katharine had feared, tend to bring it forward. What might have been the case if the distribution of the property had been different, Katharine did not distress herself by thinking. John at least had now nothing to complain of; an equal division was made of the whole, and if Katharine found herself in possession of about seven hundred pounds, when it was her father's intention that she should have had at least a thousand, the change was accepted without comment, and apparently without disappointment. But these halcyon days were not to last; Katharine, even while thankful for them, was aware that it could not be expected. The storm which had threatened to burst could not so suddenly have passed away, and though she felt quietly trusting in looking to the future, it certainly was not because she did not anticipate trial. Whether she could have looked forward as calmly without

the thought of Charles Ronaldson, it may be scrutinising too carefully to inquire. She had received one note from him since her mother's death; it reached her on the day of the funeral, and there was no business in it, except the offer to transact any of hers which lay within his reach. He had hoped, he said, most earnestly, to have been able to attend at the funeral, but finding this impossible, he could not resist sending one line; not with the idea of comforting her (he did not feel that he had the right to offer her comfort), but only to make her feel that he thought of her. This was all, but it was very soothing to Katharine. She even blamed herself for deriving from it more consolation than was right. It seemed in some ways to take the place of Higher support; but there was a dull vacant blank in her life, and even the glimmering of a faint hope that something might yet be given her to fill it was indescribably precious. The few words which had passed between them, had indeed expressed but little,—there was nothing tangible to dwell upon; but she scarcely wished that there should be. She had no heart for another affection at that moment; it would have struck her as an insult to the mother's love of which she had just been deprived. But she could not be mistaken in the consciousness that his interest in her was unaltered, and this she felt gave her, in a manner, a right to his care, a claim upon his advice and protection, which were all that in the bewilderment of her new grief she was conscious of requiring.

The waking from the dreamy maze of sorrow to the perception of the claims of definite duty, came quickly and suddenly. A few days after the funeral Katharine was sitting one afternoon, as was her wont, in the garden at work, feeling a relief in the rapid yet monotonous motion of her fingers, which gave her the idea of active employment, whilst setting her mind free to range at will. She was thinking of her mother, and her young days,—travelling again in memory the beaten track of life, from its first commencement,—not wishing to pass over it again, still less venturing to pursue in imagination its winding course into the future, but lingering over it thankfully, as she read the lesson of trust which it was formed to teach.

John and Selina were in the garden also, and they came and sat down by her, and said a few words kindly and with consideration; John at least did, and Selina was not contradictory. Katharine encouraged them to remain, for she was willing to seize every occasion which might prove that the newly established peace between them was not, on her part, about to be voluntarily broken. They talked upon some indifferent subjects, principally

little things concerning the farm. Katharine remarked that they both had rather an abstracted manner, but this seemed natural under the circumstances. She fancied that they, like herself, could not really feel much interest in any thing just then, though they might think it right to endeavour after it. Presently, Selina said carelessly, turning her head away from Katharine, and looking towards Maplestead, "I suppose you know, Kate, that Mrs. Forbes is expected home either to-day or to-morrow?"—"Home! to-day!" repeated Katharine, and a thrill of pleasure made her feel how much the darkness of her "trial hour of woe" might be lightened by what she would feel to be hearty sympathy. "So the dairy-maid said this morning when she came over to ask if we had any milk to spare," said Selina.—"And Colonel Forbes says the same," observed John, rather awkwardly, as he took a letter out of his pocket. Katharine's heart beat very quickly; these were the old times returned, but one weight was gone, and though, she did not dwell upon the thought of what was coming, or allow herself to consider how it might act upon the future of her life, it would have been impossible, after all she had gone through, not to feel thankful that there was no one but herself to shrink from the "evil to come." "Did the dairy-maid know at all how Mrs. Forbes is?" she said, shrinking instinctively from the subjects associated with the letter.—"Very bad," replied Selina, in the same careless tone; "her doctor has ordered her out of London, and from what they say it's high time."—"Colonel Forbes says she is not well," said John, again rather ostentatiously displaying the letter.—Katharine was obliged to take notice of it then. "I did not know you had heard from him," she said. "You never told me."—"Because," and John hesitated, and folded the letter most carefully into squares, making every edge meet, "you see, Kate, it's no use to worry you about things you don't like, and which can't be helped."—"Things which must be," interposed Selina.—"It may be better I should know them," said Katharine.—"Oh! know them of course you must, and so must every one in time; but I should not like you to think we were hurrying matters."—"Only that when things can't be helped," again repeated Selina. "They had better be told at once," said Katharine, quietly.—"Well then"—John looked at his wife, and stopped.—"John, what a coward!" exclaimed Selina, half angrily; "it will not kill her; we are going to Australia in six weeks, that's all."—Katharine was perfectly silent; but all colour forsook her cheek, and she worked with desperate energy.—John caught her hand—"Stop, Katharine, and tell us what you think of it."—"It's very quick, John, dear,"

said Katharine, trying to speak calmly, but the effort failed; a sense of overwhelming change and desolation came over her, and tears fell fast and bitterly. John was very much touched. "I did not think you would have felt it so much, Kitty," he exclaimed, as he kissed her.—"You have often said it would end in that, and you never seemed to want us to stay," said Selina, reproachfully.—"Hush! Selly, hush!—it's not now as bad as it would have been, Kate;" an apology which at the moment only served to make Katharine's tears flow faster.—"There's no need for it to be bad at all," said Selina; "every one tells us we shall be sure to make a fortune."—"But there has been no time to arrange about it," said Katharine; "six weeks!—how can every thing be settled so quickly?"—"Why, as to that, Kitty," said John, "it has not been quite so quick as you seem to think; when people have been planning for long beforehand, they can easily work every thing up at the end." There was an inconsistency in this to Katharine. John had always before talked to her as if all his plans were vague: now he seemed to say they had long been determined upon, but there had been so much insincerity in many ways lately, that she was not surprised, though certainly pained. "I wish you would explain things a little more clearly to me, John," she said, "because I never quite know how much I am to depend upon." John's face showed some confusion of feeling. "If you were one of us, Kitty," he said, "there would be nothing to explain; but as you have always put your face so decidedly against us, it was natural enough that we should keep our own counsel."—"And the land is actually bought?" inquired Katharine, remembering, with almost a terror, Charles Ronaldson's warning.—"Yes," replied Selina, taking up the answer, "but that is nothing new. It has been as good as bought for some weeks. There is nothing new except that, instead of leaving it all to Henry Madden to manage, we mean to go out and manage it ourselves."—"With the Moorlands farming stock to help us, and some ready money in our pockets," added John. "As to Moorlands, Colonel Forbes is only too glad to put it into other hands; that of course I know, and George Andrews' cousin will take the remainder of my lease off my hands." Then every thing had been considered and was settled; Katharine felt utterly bewildered. She could only repeat Charles Ronaldson's opinion, and begged that he might be consulted. Both John and Selina smiled. "What is the use of consulting a man after the deed is done?" said John. "I confess to being like you, Kitty, a little frightened at first; but I have talked it over with George Andrews and Jenkins, and seen Colonel

Forbes' opinion. You know you told me yourself, that he considers it a good investment; and after all, it does seem to me I should be a fool to draw back merely because Charlie Ronaldson (who, between you and me, is rather a stick in these matters) chooses to say that Henry Madden and I want some one else to advise us. If that is all, we may be able to find twenty men if we want them." — "And you really have been pledged to go for so long?" inquired Katharine, reverting to that part of the subject which rested almost more unpleasantly on her mind than any other. — "Well, yes, pledged in a certain way. You see, George Andrews is a shareholder, and it was a matter of importance to him to give the thing a good push at the beginning, and so to oblige him, I undertook a certain portion; that was just when Jenkins came down to Rilworth. Andrews quite understood I could not be expected to pay down ready money at once, but it was easily managed when he knew what I was sure of having before very long; though of course it would have been better if the thing could have been done outright. It would have saved me a matter of some pounds in the way of interest, because, as it was, George Andrews himself advanced some of the money." — Katharine felt most uncomfortable; this, then, was the reason why her mother had been so mercilessly urged. John had pledged and embarrassed himself incautiously, and then seen that it would be for his advantage to rest the burden upon her. "I don't know why you are to look so black about it all, Kate," said Selina, observing the expression of Katharine's countenance; "there is no harm done to any one." Katharine was silent. — "I don't take it kind of you, Kitty," began John; but Katharine stopped him, "Dear, dear John! we won't, please, say any thing about kind or unkind. Let it all go—the past—we can't help it, or make it better. If I was cross, you shall forgive me; only will you, please, be quite open; quite open," she repeated again "in every thing for the time to come? I get so confused, fancying that perhaps there may be something still behind." — "It is very hard to be suspected," began Selina, but John would not let her continue. He was touched by Katharine's gentleness, and owned with something of self-reproach, that he had not been quite straightforward, adding, however, as an excuse, that he had known it would frighten his poor mother if she was told suddenly that he had bought Australian land, and so he had fancied it better to bring both her and Katharine round to the notion by degrees. The apology was very unsatisfactory, as much so as the arrangement with Henry Madden, which he almost instantly afterwards began to explain with the nervous determina-

tion of a man who has a very bad case, but is resolved not to confess it. Henry Madden, it seemed, considered that the shop had been a bad speculation, and that he had been very ill-used, and was now wishing to exchange Katharine's annual claim for a very small sum, which was to set him quite free and enable him to carry on his plans without encumbrance. "I did think," observed John, as, after some circumlocution, he managed to make the plan clear to his sister, "that it might have been better to give you a claim upon his profits in Australia; but he said himself, that he would rather wipe his hands of the whole thing, it had always been a burden upon him, and he was sure it would be better for you in the end if I could only make you see it."—Katharine felt that this might be quite true, but she saw in a moment that her income at the present time must in consequence be seriously diminished. That, however, was not the painful thought; if she could see Charles Ronaldson, she might talk to him, and he would help to put that right for her. But one word of hearty affection from John, one affectionate wish that she could share their home wherever it might be, would have made her overlook every hasty word or even act of injustice; and there was nothing of the kind. Through all this long conversation, she had been put aside as if in no way concerned in any thing which was of importance to them. Her refusal to share in the speculation had, it seemed, so entirely alienated them from her, that they could leave her alone in the hour of sorrow, and scarcely give a thought as to what would become of her. John did indeed say once, "You know, Kitty, there is no good in talking to you of Australia, because you are so set against it:" but this was literally the only allusion he made to the possibility of her accompanying them. Katharine knew quite well to whom this was to be attributed, and one of those painful rushes of memory which come to us all in seasons of disappointment, brought back forcibly the days when she had been first in her home, first in some way in the affections of every member of her family—"The sunshine of the parlour," as her father had fondly named her; "My great comfort," as Mrs. Ashton was wont to describe her; and "Darling little Kitty," as John always called her whenever he wished her to grant him a favour. Oh! the bitterness of the change! the exceeding loneliness of heart! Katharine did not want to ask or hear more. She hastily took up her work and left John and Selina to congratulate themselves that now Kate was told, the worst was over.

CHAPTER LVI.

ABOUT half-past six o'clock that same evening, Katharine Ashton might be seen crossing the little path which led from the Moorlands Lane through the park of Maplestead. It was a warm, still, grey evening, almost oppressive in its sultriness, and such as insensibly takes its hue from the human heart; an evening that in childhood would give bright dreams of the warm morrow of pleasure, and in youth might make us feel the luxury of repose, without any thought of satiety; but which in middle age would seem only the visible expression of those sobering words of the Preacher: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Katharine Ashton, though still young, had full cause now to realise this truth; the dark night of sorrow which had hidden both the present and the future from her gaze, and sent her back to the dreams of the past, was vanishing, but the morning stealing upon it was colder and sadder than grief. She was to live, for years it might be, and she was to labour,—that was the appointed duty of man; but she was to live for herself,—to labour for her own approbation,—so at least she allowed herself to think. Sincere, earnest though she was, she had not yet learnt that it is possible to replace family ties by the larger affections of Christianity, or to labour for the Eye of God alone as cheerfully and unweariedly as for the fond smile and the cheering gratitude of an earthly parent. And so now, when all the interests to which she had clung through life, seemed suddenly to have forsaken her, the glance which she cast around her seemed to reveal merely the claims of duties which might or might not be acknowledged, and affections which had lost their charm because there was nothing binding to render them lasting. She could, at that moment, have loved any thing which bore the stamp of relationship, however really uncongenial; whilst she could scarcely arouse in herself even a feeling of interest in those who, whilst the ties of blood had been left untouched, were her most cherished friends.

The necessity of loving, not the choice, it was, for which her heart was yearning, and bitterly did she reproach herself with her inconsistency as she felt that not even the love of Jane Forbes, tried by years, and cemented by sorrow, could in the least make amends for the thought that John had learnt to live happily without her, and that Selina could take the children from her without, as it seemed, a regret for the fond care which would be lost to them.

True, there was another link between her and the prospect of earthly joy; but strange to say, it had suddenly ceased to be tangible. As the love of her own family forsook her, all other love became for the time unreal. She thought over her interview with Charles Ronaldson, and smiled in derision at herself for having ventured to build upon it a future of happiness. What had he done, or said, or looked, that she should believe he felt more for her than the sympathy of old and tried friendship might demand? What was there in his note which any one who had known her in childhood might not have written also? In the desolation of her heart she put aside the thought of his affection as a mocking comfort, and steeling herself against what she considered to be a weak and vain hope, resolved to face life in its loneliness and learn what were to be its duties.

Hers was no solitary trial. At that very moment hundreds on earth must have been learning the same hard lesson,—happy if, like her, they could place themselves where only it can be mastered—at the feet of Jesus. Katharine prayed long and fervently for mercy on her weakness, for strength and guidance, and then in her nervous wretchedness unable to think quietly without moving, wandered forth into the park of Maplestead, with a half-formed intention of calling to inquire for Jane, but without any idea of seeing her. She kept at a considerable distance from the house, and fancied herself quite safe from interruption, but after a little time she observed two gentlemen crossing the park from the carriage road, and as they drew nearer, she saw they were Colonel Forbes and Mr. Reeves. Katharine could not turn back without rudeness, or at least without appearing as though she fancied herself an intruder; and this, after the many permissions which had been granted her to walk in the park whenever she chose, she did not wish to acknowledge. She went on, hoping they might turn in another direction, but they came straight towards her, in the direction of Moorlands, talking earnestly, and neither of them saw her until they were about a hundred yards from her. Colonel Forbes was the first to perceive her, and his first impulse evidently was to turn back, but Mr. Reeves drew him on, and they both came up to Katharine and shook hands—Colonel Forbes as if he did not like it, but could not help himself; Mr. Reeves with that hearty sympathising pressure which says what words would fail to express. Then Colonel Forbes made a hurried apology and turned back. Mr. Reeves looked a little doubtful whether he ought not to accompany him, till a glance at Katharine's face seemed to retain him. "Are you going far?" he

asked.—“I meant to have walked to the house,” said Katharine, scarcely able to utter even these simple words from the oppression of her feelings.—“You would not have seen Mrs. Forbes,” observed Mr. Reeves.—“I was afraid not, sir, but I thought I would just go and inquire, I did not like to ask Colonel Forbes.”—“She is very ill, indeed,” was the short reply, and then Mr. Reeves turning suddenly into another path added, “Are you inclined to come with me this way?”—Katharine went with him, and they walked on for some steps in silence. He seemed as if he had something weighing on his mind.—“I was coming to Moorlands,” he said, “and Mrs. Reeves would have come with me, if she had been well enough for the walk. She sent you her kind love.”—“It is very good of her, sir,” said Katharine, but her manner was almost cold. She was thinking of Jane, and longing to see her.—“Many people feel for you, and would comfort you, if they could, Katharine,” continued Mr. Reeves, still dwelling upon what he imagined to be the natural cause of Katharine’s constraint of manner.—“Thank you, sir,” repeated Katharine, again, “they are all very good to me. Did you say that Mrs. Forbes was very ill?”—“That is the servants’ account. Colonel Forbes says she has had a sharp attack, but he is not alarmed.”—“I would rather believe the servants,” said Katharine, quickly.—“So would I too; they see things with a less prejudiced eye: at any rate she has come back from London quickly.”—“I think she would see me if I were to go to her at once,” said Katharine.—“Would you be admitted?”—“I might be,” and Katharine stopped, as if meaning to turn again to the house.—“And you cannot spare me five minutes?” said Mr. Reeves, a little reproachfully.—“Oh! yes, sir, fifty if you wish it. I can stay as long as ever I like;” and the burning tears which she had been trying to repress coursed each other down Katharine’s cheek, as she remembered that there was no one now to say, “Oh! Kate, how I have missed you!”—“I had a little talk with your brother this afternoon, Katharine,” continued Mr. Reeves.—“Had you, sir? Then you know he is going to Australia?” Katharine said this in a tone of perfect quietness; and Mr. Reeves answered in the same way, “And you are going with him, I suppose.”—“Oh! no, no, sir, never,” and Katharine stopped short in her eagerness, and again repeated, “never.”—“I am very glad of that; yet you will be terribly wanted.”—“I think not, sir. I might only be in the way, or they would find it so; I fancy at least Selina would.”—“And they have not asked you?”—“They knew I should not like it,” was Katharine’s evasive answer.—Mr. Reeves looked pained. “Then what

shall you do, Katharine?"—"I don't know, sir."—"But have you not thought? have you no wishes?"—Katharine felt as if her heart would break, but she managed to answer, "None."—"You will have," said Mr. Reeves, after the pause of a few seconds.—"Yes, if I could see duties anywhere," said Katharine.—"One duty brings another, begin the first and the second will follow."—"I don't see any first yet," said Katharine.—"The duty of being resigned to do no duties, that may be the first," observed Mr. Reeves.—"That is very hard for me when I have always had so many," said Katharine.—"You may be about to have many more," replied Mr. Reeves, "only they may be spread over a wider circle."—"And I may not be able to see them," said Katharine.—"But you must, if you place yourself in the right position. The children of God's family can never be without duties in this world."—Katharine did not reply, and he went on: "That notion of a family,—of God's family I mean, and of having work for them, we have often talked of before. It is not imaginative; it is the truest, most real tie of any, and stronger and more comforting too, if we would let it have its influence."—"It is vague to me, I am afraid," said Katharine.—"Vague only till we begin to act. Think of all those expressions of servants, working for, watching, waiting for their Lord; and the higher blessedness given us, the title of friends, of children. If Christianity is any thing but a vain dream, those words must have a literal meaning, and imply actual relationships and consequent duties."—"Reason says so," replied Katharine, "but I cannot feel it now."—"Because the earthly tie has been so mixed up with the heavenly, that the rending of the one seems to be the destruction of the other."—"Not quite, I hope, sir," said Katharine. "I am very weak and ungrateful I know, but I do not think I could ever content myself without doing something for God. But it seems very difficult and sad to have to choose."—"Perhaps that is your mistake, Katharine," said Mr. Reeves. "The thinking that you are an independent being, left alone in the world, and at liberty to choose, instead of an ignorant child waiting to be taught."—"I would wish to be taught," replied Katharine, humbly.—"But if the lesson is delayed, you would exercise your own reason."—"It would seem right to do so," answered Katharine.—"That may be a fatal error," replied Mr. Reeves. "You have read, Katharine, of the mode in which the Red Indians in the American forests follow the trail of those whom they are pursuing, catching at every indication of the path, marking the bent twigs, or the half-effaced footprints on the grass, and even

the tiny thread of a dress caught in the brambles; so must we oftentimes in life be contented to abide and search in the very spot where we are left for the very faintest indications of the path by which God would lead us onwards to Heaven. Some such there are always to be seen. The trail of our duties may be often perplexed and intricate, or it may for awhile appear absolutely to have failed; but it is never so really, and if we will but follow the very least claim which definitely presents itself, we may be quite sure that the mercy of God will soon enlarge our sight, and place us in the sphere for which we are intended. If, on the contrary, we content ourselves with searching for even the highest *possible* duty, whilst we neglect even the very smallest *positive* one, we shall infallibly be led into interminable error. You may see it, if you watch," he continued; "you may see persons, both men and women, clever, ingenious in argument, professing the highest principles, standing at some doubtful point in life, reasoning upon great duties, and at the same time omitting some very trifling ones; and if you follow their course in life, it will be through years of perplexity, all resulting from the first false step, which could never be retraced. Many things will lead to this," he added. "Impatience of doubt, energy of mind, amongst others. People cannot wait to be told; or if they do wait for a time, they are fretted because the duty to which they are called is so simple. Like Naaman, when told to wash in the waters of Jordan, they turn away, desiring rather the command to do some great thing."—"Will that be my case?" asked Katharine, with the simplicity of one who felt that the judgment of a person who had known her intimately, for so many years, would be more likely to be true than any which she might form of herself."—"It would be the natural fault of your circumstances," he replied, "and I think it would belong to your character. Activity of mind has its own peculiar snare and its own special trial."—"I have felt that," said Katharine, "it is as difficult for me to sit still as it is for many other persons to act."—"Yes, I was sure of that; and so when I heard of your brother's plans and found that you were not included in them, I felt at once how painful it would be to you to be thus suddenly, as it were, thrown out of employment, and I could not help fearing that you might be in consequence entirely dispirited, or tempted to form some scheme without mature deliberation."—"Then John said nothing to you, sir, about my going with them?" inquired Katharine."—"He alluded to it in a way. He said that you were unfortunately opposed to his notions! But you would not like to go, should you, Katharine?"—"No," exclaimed Ka-

tharine ; and the quick remembrance of all she might lose if she did go gave energy to the word ; “ but I should like to have been asked.”—“ You would have been placed in a great perplexity then. It would have been the suggestion of a duty.”—“ I did not think of that before,” said Katharine. “ No, it is all best as it is ; yet I do think they might have thought of me.”—“ Try and put the thought aside,” said Mr. Reeves, “ or what, perhaps, may be more wise, face it, by putting yourself in their position. The more their hearts are bent upon the plan, the more they would dislike the idea of having a person with them who disapproved of it : and remember these are but early days ; your brother has scarcely had time to think upon what he intends to do himself.”—“ Yet he must sail in six weeks, so he says,” replied Katharine.—Mr. Reeves looked rather startled. “ That is very quick,” he remarked. “ It would seem impossible to settle every thing in such a very short time.”—“ Mr. Andrews will help,” said Katharine ; “ in fact, I believe he has long been putting things in train. He is too clever not to have seen that he was certain to gain his point with John at last.”—“ And you stay with them till they go ; of course ?” said Mr. Reeves.—“ I suppose so, sir, but I had not thought particularly about it.”—“ You had not thought particularly about any thing, I imagine,” continued Mr. Reeves.—“ No, sir ; I do not seem to care, except for the children,” she added, whilst tears glistened in her eyes.—“ Well, then,” said Mr. Reeves, “ may I give you one or two little pieces of advice ? One is to look upon this feeling of not caring as a fault ; a natural one perhaps, but still a fault, and like all other faults, to be conquered, first by prayer, then by action. We were not sent into the world to be indifferent, and one of the temptations of sorrow is that it makes us so.”—“ But I cannot see what I am to do,” observed Katharine.—“ Follow the trail of your duties, and specially guard against impatience if it should be perplexed. Can you be any use to your brother ?”—“ Yes,” replied Katharine, “ great use, but that will soon be over.”—“ God will provide,” said Mr. Reeves ; “ we need work only for the day. Business and interest then are prepared for you for the next six weeks.”—“ Business certainly,” replied Katharine.—“ And interest, too, more than you think, unless you are very strangely altered.”—“ And after that ?” said Katharine.—“ After that I do most confidently believe that something will be pointed out to you by a sure indication. If it should not be so, there are certain guiding posts which will always help us and prevent our being left to the misery of choice as to our road. Where we are we had better remain, unless actually called upon to move. Rilworth

will have a greater claim upon you than any other place.”—“Certainly, and I could not bear to go away from it,” said Katharine, “though my life must be very changed now.”—“Then old friends are a great tie.”—“Yes, indeed;” and Katharine thought of Jane, and wondered that the possibility of leaving her could ever have crossed her mind.—“The work you have been accustomed to will be better than new work,” continued Mr. Reeves.—“The district, you mean?” said Katharine.—“Yes, work amongst the poor. So far,” he added, “you have at this moment some hints given you; but I have not a question in my own mind that they will eventually be made clearer, if only you will not throw yourself into confusion by missing any duty which presents itself. I should say, for instance, that if you were to be impatient now, and leave your brother, because things are not quite comfortable with him, and you desire at once to have a home of your own, you would be making a great mistake; or if you were to sit down and form an ideal of the life you would wish to live, and then look round the world to see where it could best be carried out, you would certainly blunder; or if even you were to plan the kind of work which you considered best for your own mind, you would almost infallibly err. Circumstances which put duties in our way, those are the things to be attended to, only with one most earnest caution, that if we put aside a duty, and then enter upon what may seem to us a definite path, we commit an error at the beginning, and shall most unquestionably suffer for it.” They were drawing near the house at Maplestead, and Mr. Reeves paused, and said, “I have given you what some people would call sorry comfort, Katharine; but practical people require practical help. I think you understand why I have spoken in this way, when there must be other thoughts so much nearer your heart.”—“I can deal with them myself,” said Katharine.—“Yes, there is consolation for them in every word of the Bible, and I knew you would have sought and found it. Earthly perplexities are the things which sharpen the keen edge of sorrow.”—Katharine stood for a moment looking up at the windows of the house. Jane’s room fronted that way, and all the blinds were down. “I like to think,” she said, “that old friendship is a tie of duty; that Maplestead is not merely a romance to me.”—Mr. Reeves turned to her very quickly: “Duty,” he said; “yes, the greatest possible duty. Katharine, she needs all the help that you can give her.” The words seemed to escape him involuntarily. Katharine had never before heard any allusion so direct. She longed to ask him how much he knew—whether the expression implied a suspicion of

Jane's unhappiness, or only of her illness ; but he seemed conscious of having betrayed more than he had intended, and in his usual quick and almost cold way, he shook hands suddenly, and left her.

CHAPTER LVII.

KATHARINE went round to the back door to inquire for Mrs. Forbes ; she was often in the habit of doing so, when wishing to avoid Colonel Forbes, or, as was now the case, too late to see Jane. Her appearance this evening, however, seemed rather *mal à propos* ; there was a sound of scuffling feet, and angry voices, amongst which Mademoiselle Laurette's was very audible, and Katharine was kept so long without an answer that she was induced at length to make her way to the housekeeper's room. It was a cheerful, airy apartment, far enough from the kitchen to be out of the way of interruption, and Katharine had spent many quiet half-hours there when waiting to see Jane, or managing little matters of parish business with Mrs. Brown. She knocked at the door with the easy confidence of a person who is quite sure of a kind welcome, but the housekeeper's "Come in !" was a little hasty, and Katharine on entering found herself in the presence not only of Mrs. Brown, but of Mr. Crewe, who was standing by the window with an air of supreme composure and self-approbation, apparently giving his testimony upon some important subject. — "Good evening, Miss Ashton. Mr. Crewe, be so good as to set a chair for Miss Ashton," and Crewe slowly stepped forward, and placed the chair, and then as slowly went back to his position. "I came to inquire for Mrs. Forbes," said Katharine ; "I was afraid it would be rather late to ask to see her." — "Mrs. Forbes is in a slight degree fatigued with her journey," replied Crewe, as if the question could only be addressed to himself ; "but it was a short time ; we always travel per express." — "Mrs. Forbes would be a great deal better if people would only let her stay quiet in one place," said the housekeeper, angrily. "What can be more tiring than being whisked through the air thirty miles an hour ? One might as well be a bird." — "Different people have different opinions, Mrs. Brown," observed Crewe ; "for my part, there's nothing more to my taste, provided only my company's agreeable." He said this with rather a marked emphasis, and the housekeeper observed, shortly, that agreeable company was rare enough in

this world.—“Very rare; nothing more so, Mrs. Brown. Have you any commands for Rilworth? The Colonel wishes me to ride in with a letter for to-morrow’s early post.”—“You would not attend to my commands, if they were given, Mr. Crewe,” was the reply; “so there’s little need for me to trouble myself with telling them; though you might as well call at the chemist’s with that prescription for your mistress.”—“Mrs. Forbes’ prescription did you say?” said Crewe, doubtfully.—“Mrs. Forbes—your mistress’s prescription,” repeated the housekeeper, quickly.—“Oh! Mrs. Forbes’ prescription, I will endeavour to remember;” and bowing majestically to Katharine, Crewe departed.—“If that is not airified, I don’t know what is,” exclaimed the housekeeper, as soon as he had left the room; “and it’s the upsetting of the house, and the turning of every thing topsy turvy; and I can’t abide it. Did you ever, now, Miss Ashton, see a fellow like that?”—“Not often,” replied Katharine, with a smile; “but he does not come much in your way, I suppose, Mrs. Brown?”—“Not come in my way! I should like to know if he doesn’t come in the way of every one in the house. Why he’s quite master, you know,” she added, lowering her voice.—“I should not have thought Colonel Forbes would have allowed any one to be master but himself,” said Katharine.—“He would not if he knew it,” said Mrs. Brown; “but it’s not the less true that he does not know it; and I can tell you what, Miss Ashton, if there’s any one wants a thing done in this house, why they’d best turn to Crewe, let it be what it may. There’s more things behind the scenes in great houses than you’d dream of, and, between ourselves—but there, won’t you sit down now and take a cup of tea? It will be up in a minute.” Katharine would fain have excused herself, but Mrs. Brown’s hospitality would not be denied. Rejoicing in the thought of a little comfortable gossip, she drew a small round table to the window, took out of her closet a pot of choice preserves, and, ringing the bell, gave directions that tea for two should be made ready directly, adding, as she placed a chair for Katharine, “There now, we’ll just sit down and be snug.” Katharine cared little for the snugness, but she did care a great deal to hear any thing that could be told her about Jane, and she was just beginning to ask some questions which might lead to further explanation, when the door burst open, and Laurette rushed into the room, her black eyes sparkling, her hair in disorder, and her little French cap scarcely resting on her head. She was closely followed by Crewe. “He is a poltron, a liar, a what-d’ye-call, a wretch,” she exclaimed, turning round to the

door, and almost thrusting her clenched hand into Crewe's face. Crewe drew back and quietly folded his arms. "Un méchant! un poltron!" again ejaculated Laurette. "Point de pitié! Ah! pauvre madame!"—"You'd best go back to her, Laurette," said the housekeeper, "it's only making a fool of yourself standing here."—A bell rang violently. "Your mistress wants you, Mamselle Laurette," said Crewe, coolly.—"My mistress? ah! méchant! poltron!" and Laurette still stood, shaking her hand threateningly at Crewe.—"What is all this folly, Mr. Crewe?" asked the housekeeper, angrily.—"Mamselle has a fancy for making me a common carrier, that's all," replied Crewe, in the same imperturbable tone; "there's your bell again, Mamselle."—Laurette looked as if she could have struck him, but not one step did she move.—"I shan't be back till after supper, Mrs. Brown," said Crewe; "you'll have some put by for me."—"If there's any left, Mr. Crewe," muttered the housekeeper, as he withdrew slowly, and perfectly unmoved.—"Come, Mamselle, we don't want you here;" but Laurette, instead of listening to the injunction, only threw herself into a chair, and began to rock herself helplessly backwards and forwards, interspersing her abuse of Crewe with piteous lamentations for "pauvre madame," whose bell now rang for the third time.—"If it's not too bad!" exclaimed the housekeeper, "why she might be dead and buried before such a fool would be any good. Mamselle! don't you hear? Three times that bell's rung."—"Let me go," said Katharine; but she had scarcely spoken the word, when Laurette started up, and with a fierce look of indignation rushed away.—"And that's what they call the best lady's maid to be had in all London!" said the housekeeper contemptuously, as she closed the door and bolted it carefully, and then replaced herself at the table.—"Now, would you believe it, Miss Ashton, that we have had those scenes two and three times a day for the last month?"—"No, certainly, I should not have believed it," said Katharine; "I should have supposed the case would have been easily settled by sending Mademoiselle Laurette about her business."—"And getting another just like her," said Mrs. Brown; "why, Miss Ashton, the trouble those ladies' maids have been to me, and the fuss to my poor mistress, is more than words can tell; and all owing to that fellow Crewe, with his stiff tie and set-up manner. You see,"—and she drew her chair confidentially near to Katharine—"you see, Miss Ashton, there are a good many of ins and outs in a house of this kind; and if things aren't quite straight at the top, why it's not so reasonable to suppose they'll be straight at

the bottom; and there's none quicker than servants at finding this out; and when 'tis found out, there's a want of what should be, and folks will go their own way spite of all you can say to them."—Katharine was accustomed to Mrs. Brown's mysteries, but the drift of her present observations was not quite distinct enough to enable her to reply to them.—"An ounce of common sense! that's what's wanted," continued the housekeeper, despairingly; "but where to look for it is more than I can say; and now my poor lady is so ill, she's not able to look into things more than a baby; and the Colonel listens just to what Mr. Crewe says, and nobody else is able to put in a word. No, Miss Ashton, it's not a place to be envied, I can tell you, is that of overseer of all the goings on in a great house; and when things aren't straight at the top, as I said, there's no reason to expect they'll be straight at the bottom; so it's all natural enough; but what's to be done?" Mrs. Brown replenished her tea-cup, and, in default of other comfort, helped herself to an additional lump of sugar. "Not quite finished I see, Miss Ashton," as she looked into Katharine's cup; "you are not such a tea-drinker as I am: but, as I was saying, what's to be done?"—"With Laurette?" asked Katharine.—"Oh! for the matter of that, she may go, and somebody else may come; but it isn't one or the other that will make the difference."—"Then is it Mr. Crewe?" asked Katharine, bluntly.—"Why, it is Mr. Crewe, and it isn't. No doubt he's for having his thumb in every pie, and no one else to put in a finger, and certain he and Mamselle manage to make a regular fight of it every day for nothing at all. But I should be glad to think the evil would go with Mr. Crewe; but I don't, Miss Ashton, I don't. And that's what I would not say to every one, to no one indeed who was not an old friend like yourself." Katharine felt that she knew quite well what the evil was, but she could not bring herself to remark upon it. "Parties,—that's what I can't abide," continued Mrs. Brown; "it never used to be, nor never ought, nor indeed was till Mr. Crewe came into the house. But now it's who's for master, and who's for mistress; and the lady's maid and the gentleman's gentleman at daggers drawn; and it's little enough that I can do to help it."—"But it must be all nonsense," said Katharine; "it is impossible that Colonel or Mrs. Forbes can know any thing about it."—"Not the Colonel," replied Mrs. Brown; "he's not a man to think whether he has got a servant or not, as long as he has his orders attended to; but Mrs. Forbes is a different matter. It comes home to her, I'll venture to say, every hour in the day."—"Because Laurette is so foolish, I sup-

pose?" said Katharine.—"Partly that, but partly it would be the same with every one. Poor thing, how she is thwarted!"—"I don't understand," said Katharine.—Mrs. Brown refilled the teapot, left her seat, and tried the bolt of the door, and then sat down again, and in an under voice replied, "The long and the short of the matter is, Miss Ashton, what you and I have seen this many a long day—sorrow to the hour that first I opened my eyes to it—the Colonel's got a will of his own, and my poor dear lady has given into it till he's a perfect Turk; and it's grown into such a habit, that I do believe he contradicts for the mere sake of contradiction, and not a bit because he cares for what he fusses about. At least, I am sure that nine times out of ten they are such trifles, it would not be in the mind of any man with a grain of sense to think twice about them. Well, there's Crewe always about him; and a sharp man, and knowing that it's his interest to humour him; so whenever the Colonel makes a fuss or complains, there's Crewe certain to aggravate; and if Mamselle Laurette comes with a message or a wish, there's Crewe always going against her and finding fault, and then she flies into a fury, and there's a grand scene; you saw to-night what it was. All that to-do was nothing, but because Crewe was cross and would not do some errand in Rilworth."—"And Mrs. Forbes suffers from it, I am afraid," said Katharine.—"Doesn't she suffer? She likes Laurette in a way, because of her being affectionate; and, poor thing! she clings so to any one that will love her and be kind to her. But then, Laurette is a fool, and always getting into scrapes, and making the Colonel angry, and many a time he has threatened she shall be sent away; and she is going before long."—"But the next person who comes may be just as bad," said Katharine.—"Just as bad, or worse; what is wanted is something that will never be found in any that call themselves lady's maids; at least, as far as my experience goes, and I've had a great deal. It's a nurse and a friend that is required, and how to get one."—Katharine felt as if she could not answer. Such a dreary feeling came over her, such a sense of Jane's trial, it made her very heart sink. If she could only help her! But how was that to be done? At last she said, "It is a friend in her own rank of life whom Mrs. Forbes needs."—"It is not what people need, but what they can get, that's to be considered in this world, Miss Ashton," replied the housekeeper. "As for needing, my poor mistress needs enough in all conscience, but she's never a whit the more likely to get it. The Colonel's a good man; 'tis not for me who have eaten of his bread for fifteen

years come next Christmas, to say a word against him; but all that time I've never known any one come into this house, be it man, woman, or child, that came as far as I could see for the mere liking. There were the Miss Forbes, good creatures as ever lived, they used to be here at one time, and my poor mistress was inclined to take a good deal to them, especially to the eldest; but somehow, it didn't do. I don't think the Colonel liked having his wife's thoughts taken off from him, and Miss Forbes used sometimes to laugh at him, and sometimes to go contrary to him, and so the visits have dwindled away till they have come to a mere nothing. It would be the same with any one. You must make up your mind not to cross the Colonel, or you can't live with him."—Katharine sighed deeply.—"He'll see it by and by," continued Mrs. Brown, gravely, "for he's fond of her."—Katharine sat silent for some seconds in deep thought, then she said quietly, but very earnestly, "Something must be done before that." The housekeeper's face brightened, "And do you say that, Miss Ashton? Well, that's a comfort; for I'll tell you there's many a month it has all been on my mind, and no one to say a word to about it, though it was growing worse every day, and only one comfort when you used to come over. That was the thing which did my poor mistress good, and that was what I used to look to to keep her up. And then we went off to London, and there things were—I can't say what—always company at home, or going out late, and Mrs. Forbes wearing away to a thread, and yet never saying a word, like an angel as she is; and the Colonel getting worse and worse, for he's twenty times as contradictory now as he was. It nearly drove me wild; and all the comfort I had was in thinking that we should soon be coming down here, and then you'd be at hand again. And then, just when we came, the very first thing I heard was the news that you were all to be off to Australia straight. It gave me such a turn! I declare I haven't recovered it yet. But it isn't true surely?"—"It is true that my brother, and his wife, and the children are going," said Katharine; "but it is not true that I am to go with them."—Mrs. Brown breathed a sigh of relief, "Well! thank Heaven for that. There is some comfort at last left in the world. But 'twill be a lonely life for you. What do you mean to do with yourself? Not go far away I hope!"—"Not further than Rilworth, certainly; but I have formed no plans. I hope to do what may be most useful."—"Then you won't go far away from Maplestead, for there's no place where you'll be wanted more."—"I should not like to go far away, and

you may be quite sure I will consider it in my plans.”—“Thank you. Then I’m sure some good will come. You’ll perhaps be over here to-morrow again, and if by chance you should hear of such a person as would do to take Mamselle Laurette’s place, you’ll take care to mention it.”—“Certainly,” said Katharine, and she rose, and took up her bonnet and gloves. “Will you please tell Mrs. Forbes that I was here to-night, and that I only did not ask to see her because I knew it was the time when Colonel Forbes was likely to be with her?”—“And I may say you’ll be here to-morrow,” said the housekeeper; “she won’t be satisfied else; and I can’t bear to fret her, she is terribly weak.”—“I shall hope to be here at eleven; but you don’t think Mrs. Forbes very much worse I trust,” said Katharine, anxiously.—The housekeeper shook her head, “It’s a wasting, internal complaint, that’s my belief, Miss Ashton. Some say it’s one thing, and some another, but nothing that any of them give is of any use, only just at least to set her up for a time; and there’s the fret of the spirits working always to keep her back.—Poor thing! poor thing!—This journey to-day was quite sudden, when she wasn’t a bit fit for it. The Colonel heard something about possibly a change of parliament, and so he must needs be down here to talk about his votes. How men do slave when their wills go with their work!”

It was a truism which Katharine did not feel at that moment inclined to refute, and she wished Mrs. Brown good evening and returned to Moorlands

CHAPTER LVIII.

“LETTERS are late,” said John, looking at his watch, as he came down to breakfast the next morning. He had become an important man of business now, and the arrival of the post was a serious event in the day. Katharine also looked out anxiously for the post, yet her expectations were by no means definite, only in her state of indecision every trifle became of consequence, as serving in some way to indicate the future. “We shall hear about the passage-money to-day,” continued John, “and the outfit.”—“And when we must go up to Town,” added Selina, who had seldom been in London, and looked forward to her necessary visit, and the pleasure of making purchases, with the ex-

citement of a child. "We shall have a fortnight there, at least," continued John; "Kitty, you mean to go up with us, and see the last of us, of course?" He meant this kindly, and Katharine tried to reply in the same manner. "I don't know that there will be much pleasure in seeing the last of you, but I will do any thing in the world I can to be of use to you." — Only you won't throw yourself into the plan," continued John, a little reproachfully. — "That's an old story, John, dear," said Katharine, lightly, feeling in a degree relieved and pleased at his mentioning the subject even in this way; "we had better not talk about it." — "Oh! it never would do for Kate," interrupted Selina; "she hasn't half spirit enough, and never had from a child." Katharine smiled; for certainly want of spirit had not been the accusation usually brought forward against her in her young days. "Old Downes has got spirit enough," said John, looking at the postman, who was then just coming up to the house. "Did you ever see an old fellow trudge along more heartily? and such a heap of letters! — now for it!" He hurried out to the door, seized the packet of letters, and tossed them on the table. "'Mrs. John Ashton,' — that's for you, Selly. 'Miss Ashton,' Kate, that's yours. Oh! and here's the outfit." He tore open the envelope, and was soon so engrossed in his business that neither he nor Selina, who leant over his shoulder and read the letter with him, perceived that Katharine had left them.

The hand-writing had brought a thrill to her heart, and a heightened colour to her cheek, which she would fain hide from notice. It was only when the door of her own room was closed, and bolted, that she trusted herself to break the seal.

Not a long letter — yet not one to be read with perfect indifference. It was dated from London.

"MY DEAR, MISS ASHTON, — I have this moment heard most startling news, that John intends going to Australia immediately, and that you have resolved to go with him. May I entreat for one line by return of post, to set my mind at ease? I might ask for more, but that I hope to be at Moorlands by the day after to-morrow, at the farthest. In the meantime, one word will be I cannot say how great a satisfaction. In the greatest haste, very sincerely yours,

"CHARLES RONALDSON."

The day after to-morrow! And would she see him then so soon; and would he come only for her; and was he really so

deeply anxious, and interested for her ! It was a ray of dazzling sunshine in a most dreary world, and Katharine's heart bounded with gratitude for the Mercy which had again sent her comfort in her hour of need. More she could not even then venture to think of. Though there was much implied in the note, it was still, even in its haste, most carefully worded. She read it again and again, but something in her own mind kept her from drawing forth all that another might have gathered from it. To expect so much from him was to acknowledge to herself how much she required ; and Katharine, even now, was striving to keep from herself the consciousness of the state of her own feelings. She tried to persuade herself, and almost she succeeded, that even her present comfort was derived from the remembrance of old times and the support of long-tried friendship ; and when the thought suggested itself, that the note was not a common note, and could not be shown to her brother, she excused her unwillingness by saying that if John saw it, Selina must too, and she was always laughing at her about Charles, and so it might be better not to bring uncomfortable remarks upon herself.

Such was the state of Katharine's mind when she set out to walk to Maplestead ; and changed indeed was the appearance of the world, both physical and moral, since she wandered forth in her lonely sorrow the preceding evening. It was morning now, brilliant in beauty, warm and genial : there were sweet songs of birds to be heard, and the lowing of browsing cattle, and the cry of the shepherd amongst the hills, and the faint murmur of the soft summer breeze amongst rustling branches, and, from far away, the gurgling of a little brook, making its way over smooth pebbles to join a distant river. All spoke of hope, and energy, and a loving, working obedience to an Almighty Will ; and in Katharine's heart, too, there were feelings which sprang up responsive to the teaching of nature ; — a heart to rejoice in loving trust, and an energy untired, because it had never yet been allowed to slumber, — and an humble devotion, willing at any sacrifice to answer the call of Him whom she served, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." And so, even with the veil of sorrow over the natural gladness of her disposition, Katharine went forth that morning rejoicing.

She went again to the back of the house ; it was always more pleasant to be admitted by a housemaid, and shown first into the housekeeper's room, than to be received by a footman, and perhaps encounter the stately Crewe. "As good as your word, I see, Miss Ashton," was the greeting which she received ; "and

Mrs. Forbes is all ready for you, and quite in a fuss expecting you; and the Colonel's in the library with Mr. Andrews, and loads of people waiting to see him on business, so you'll have your time all to yourself." — "And how is Mrs. Forbes this morning?" inquired Katharine. "Why, as ill as she need be. She had one of her fainting fits last night, after you were gone, — all, I suspect, from the flurry of that foolish girl Laurette, who would come in the Colonel's way, and got a threat of being sent off at a moment's notice; and the consequence of that was a bad night, and so this morning she's not up; but she will see you, notwithstanding; she sent down word about it." — "Then I had better go at once, I suppose?" said Katharine. — "Yes, if you don't mind, — shall I ring for Laurette, to show you the way?" — "No, thank you," replied Katharine; "not if I am expected. I know my way pretty well," she added, with a smile; "and I suppose if I knock at the door, that will be sufficient." — "Oh yes, quite, — it will be all the better if Laurette is not there, only take care she does not listen. Perhaps, if you don't mind, you had better go up the back staircase, and then you will be out of the way of the Colonel and the gentlemen."

Back stairs or front stairs were alike to Katharine, and she proceeded to the gallery leading to Jane's room, — the servants whom she met making way for her as a privileged person. Her knock was not answered, as she had feared, by Laurette, for Jane was alone. Her feeble voice was scarcely heard, and when Katharine went in, she found her, as the housekeeper had said, in bed. That might have made some difference in her appearance; but Katharine was instantly struck by the change which had passed over her even since they had last met. Then she had seemed only very much out of health, in a state from which many are known to recover, and to enjoy years of comparative health; but there was no trace of this now, she looked a complete wreck — worn and emaciated, and with that unnatural sparkling of the eye which betokens the presence of constant fever. She had no cough, or Katharine would at once have considered her consumptive: but there was something almost worse in this hidden disease, which no one seemed exactly to understand; and there was a restlessness also in her manner, which was very painful. It might partly have been physical, the consequence of the irregular action of the heart; but Katharine had not been many minutes with her before she perceived that it was in a degree the work of the mind also, — she was like a person who has been frightened, and has never recovered the shock. When Katharine first went

in, and sat down by her, the very way in which she seized her hand, and kept it, betokened not only mere pleasure, but a nervous fear of losing something precious; and her eye wandered perpetually to the door, and she made Katharine go and try it, to be quite sure that it was bolted; and even then she was not satisfied. Katharine was so quick in all her perceptions, and loved Jane so truly, that these little things were seen and remarked, and even commented upon in her own mind as soon as they passed before her notice; but there was nothing in her outward manner to betray any agitation,—she was even, perhaps, singularly composed. She spoke slowly, and without energy, and only a very little touch of deep feeling, which she could not restrain, showed itself when Jane said, in her sweet voice, and looking at her with tears dimming her eyes,—“I have longed to come to you, dear Katharine. I did not think any one else would be able to feel for you as I can.”—“I have had a great deal of comfort, dear Mrs. Forbes,” said Katharine; “more a great deal, than I could possibly expect. Yes, a great deal more,” she repeated, and she remembered the morning’s letter. “But I do think there is no one that can understand things quite as you can.”—“I like to hear you say that,—are you quite sure you bolted the door?” Katharine only smiled; she would not even look to the door again. “Colonel Forbes might have things to say to me, and he might wish to find me alone,” continued Jane, apologetically; “it worries him if Laurette is here, he does not like her.”—“She is not a very pleasant person, is she?” asked Katharine.—“She is fond of me,” said Jane; “and I like people to be fond of me,” she added, in the touchingly simple tone of an humble child.—“A great many people are very fond of you, I am sure,” said Katharine.—“A few, not very many. I don’t know many people, Katharine; that is, I have not many friends,—not any, I think, except you.” Katharine smoothed her hand fondly, and said, “You have no one who loves you better;” and Jane looked up at her confidingly, and repeated, “No one.” But a change came over her face the moment afterwards, and she added,—“No one amongst my friends; one never can reckon children, or”—and she hesitated—“one’s husband.”—“Are the children well?” asked Katharine. “Yes, quite well: London suited them very well; and Lucy was just put in good training about her shoulder, which is inclined to grow out; and I would have stayed another fortnight, for her to have seen the surgeon again, but Colonel Forbes did not wish it.”—“He is not generally so anxious to get back to the country,” said Katharine. “No,

but some persons say that parliament will be dissolved before long, and you see he was obliged to come. We had a very hurried journey yesterday. I did not know I was coming away till the morning, and Laurette did not either; but it could not be helped.” —“And is Laurette a helpful person in an emergency?” inquired Katharine. “Not very, she loses her memory, and is flurried; and Colonel Forbes is rather quick in his orders sometimes, and that makes her worse.” —“But surely you might find some one more useful,” said Katharine. —“More useful, perhaps, but not so fond of me. Is that very weak, Katharine?” she added, with a smile, which brought back to Katharine’s mind the demurely arch expression of Jane’s face in childhood. “I think,” said Katharine, “that it would be a good thing if your friends were to interfere for you, dear Mrs. Forbes, and find some one who is really competent to wait upon you. The scene I saw down stairs last night was quite sufficient to convince me that Laurette is perfectly incapable of performing her duties properly.” —“Ah, you were here last night. Mrs. Brown told me about it, but that was only — didn’t you hear a step in the passage? Do just go and see if it is Colonel Forbes; but don’t show yourself, if you can help it, or he might not like to come in.” Katharine went to the door, but found no one there. “Bolt it! be sure you bolt it!” said Jane; and then, when Katharine returned to her, she continued, —“Crewe interferes, and puts things wrong. I don’t think any thing will go right whilst he is here.” —“You should have some one who would not care for Crewe,” said Katharine. “Ah, Katharine! you can’t comprehend; how should you! But I shall not care for any thing now that I am at home again, and you here.” —“I shall come and see you whenever I possibly can,” said Katharine; “even when I have left Moorlands I hope I shall still be very near.” —“Going from Moorlands!” —and Jane started up, and gazed at her with a look of entreaty; “who says you must?” —“No one, exactly, but John and Selina are going to Australia.” —“And you are going with them, I am sure, and it was all true,” exclaimed Jane. She threw her arm round Katharine’s neck, and, clinging to her, added in a hollow voice, “and you promised you would be with me.” —“Promised, and therefore, God helping me, I will keep my promise, dear Mrs. Forbes,” said Katharine, soothingly. “I am not going to Australia. I am not going any where far away; — not that I know of, or intend, that is,” she added, correcting herself as if by instinct. “I did not mean to frighten you. I would not have said so, if I thought you would have misunderstood,” she con-

tinued, alarmed at the quick throbbing of Jane's heart, which she could even hear.—“It is not all your doing,” said Jane, recovering herself a little; “but once before, a fortnight ago now, they came to me with a story—Laurette did: I think she heard it from Crewe, and it was very sad to me,—it made me ill. Oh! Katharine, I have looked so to your help since I have been worse,” she added, as she sank back upon her pillow, and laid her burning hand in Katharine's. “And did they tell you I was going to Australia?” inquired Katharine. “Laurette said it, and I asked Philip,—Colonel Forbes,—and I think I made him angry, he was so vexed at the moment. I was to have gone out to a party, and I could not, because I was ill. He told me it was nonsense; he said your brother had bought land, that was all; and it was what you had told me. He would not let me write again. You know I had just sent you a few lines. He said I was to be kept quiet, and writing letters, and having them, was excitement; and he made Dr. Lowe forbid it. I trusted his word quite.” A quick step was heard along the passage. “That is Laurette,” said Jane, quickly, her ear catching the slightest sound; “Katharine, don't go, tell me again.”—“I am not going to Australia, I am going to stay with you,” said Katharine, quietly, but very earnestly. “With me? ah! if it could be! Just look out; tell Laurette she need not wait. I think sometimes she listens.” Katharine opened the door suddenly, so suddenly that Laurette was taken by surprise, and with a face of indignant confusion turned away. “This must not be, dear Mrs. Forbes,” observed Katharine, returning to her, and speaking very gravely. “If you were well, you would be the first person to see that it is unfitting.”—“She is going,” said Jane, bitterly; “I mean to tell her to-day. Death will come, and I shall be at the mercy of a stranger.” A sudden impulse crossed Katharine's mind; another, equally sudden, checked it; it seemed as if her heart, for the moment, was paralysed. Jane looked at her anxiously. “Katharine, you are very pale.”—“Am I?”—and the blood rushed to Katharine's cheek, but forsook it again almost instantly. “It is extremely hot,” she said; and she moved away to the open window, and stood by it, looking out upon the large trees in the park, as they glittered in the gladness of the sunshine. That promise,—that long-ago promise, that she would, if possible, comfort Jane in the hour of trial, which she could not but think might be near,—how was it to be kept?—and what was it that held her back when she would fain offer to keep it?—Pride? There had been no pride when, weeks before, she had said that she would

be with Jane as her servant, and had felt that the permission would be happiness. — Self-indulgence? shrinking from the discomforts of such a position? But that was not Katharine's temptation at any moment, least of all when her affections were concerned.—Coldness? Had she suddenly forgotten the ties of youth, — the true love of advancing years? Now, when Jane was lonely, suffering, it might be dying — neglected by her husband, fretted by her servants, clinging to her as her best comfort,—was she about to shrink from making the offer, which before, in a calmer hour, she had felt might be not only a duty, but an unspeakable comfort?

It was a moment of keen struggle; for ever as she thought of Jane, and her sorrow, and her affection, a voice whispered in her ear that a dearer love was at that moment awaiting her. It told her that she was not free to act for herself, that another had a claim upon her; and it suggested also—though the suggestion was in a moment cast aside as unworthy — that Charles Ronaldson, rising in his profession, increasing in worldly wealth, holding a station which, from his character, was higher than was due to his birth, might hesitate to connect himself with one who, from whatever circumstances, had been led to place herself in a position of dependence.

Swift as lightning the thoughts flashed through her mind, and as swiftly also were they rejected by the inborn sincerity of Katharine's noble heart. The trail of her duties—was it not here to be found? The present certain, the future uncertain! Must not the sacrifice be made, and the future placed in the Hands of God? Whatever Charles might feel, she was as yet free; he had no real claim upon her. Beyond this she need not look. Whether for weeks or months,—whether such a step might involve a long separation, or even worse sorrow, — it was not for her to inquire: the present alone was her care. She went back to the bedside, and, taking Jane's hand, said,—“Dear Mrs. Forbes, would you do me one great favour—the greatest you can?” Jane looked at her in surprise. “A favour, dear Katharine! Of course; can you doubt it?”—“A favour greater than any you have conferred yet,” continued Katharine. “When Laurette goes, may I replace her?” Jane evidently did not at once understand her meaning. Katharine repeated her words; and still Jane said, with the same wondering look,—“Yes, I trust you to be with me as much as you can.”—“Not as much as I can, but always,” said Katharine. “I will be your maid, if you will have me,” she added, speaking with perfect plainness, from the fear of doing Jane harm by any thing like suspense. Jane's countenance fell. “No, no,” she exclaimed

eagerly, "it must not be; only be with me at the last, when that shall come."—"But you shall listen to me, dear Mrs. Forbes," said Katharine, in a tone of great quietness; "and I will tell you why it may and must be." But Jane would not hear: "Impossible!" she repeated, again and again; "my maid! impossible."—"Then it is impossible to make me happy," said Katharine. "But to give up your friends, your position, to wait upon me,—to be my servant! Oh, no, Katharine, never; it would be beneath you."—"Beneath me to comfort you, and do God's will?" said Katharine; "that can scarcely be. Will you listen to me for a few moments, dear Mrs. Forbes?" she added, and she bent tenderly over Jane, smoothing her pillow, and making her lean her head against her shoulder. "I will speak of the change in my position first," she continued, "since it is that which weighs with you, and I will tell you honestly what I feel about it. We are all workers for God; if we are not we ought to be; I at least would wish to be. Years ago, Mr. Reeves taught me to feel, that to work for Him is so great an honour, that it makes the meanest task noble; so when He puts a claim before me, it cannot be, it is impossible it should be, degradation. If I were a queen I could not be greater, and if I were a beggar I could not be less, than I am, for still I must be what I am in His sight." Jane pressed her hand and smiled, but still she murmured, "The world will not understand."—"And if I were living for the world," said Katharine, "that would assuredly be of importance to me. But, dear Mrs. Forbes, I may say to you what I could not to others. It has been my prayer and my endeavour for years to live not for the world but for God, and He has so far blessed me that I cannot measure either duties or trials by the world's standard. I do not mean," she added, "that I am above the weakness of being affected by it; but I do mean that when it comes to a question of decision in matters of real importance, it is absolutely impossible for me to attach weight to what the world will say, except so far as my duty to God is affected by it. Remember," she continued, "that I have no one to be in any way injured—if such a thing could be—by what I may choose to do. I am free; with every tie of gratitude and love to make me sure that, in giving you comfort, I am doing the work which God has appointed me."—"But it may be done in another way, dear Katharine," said Jane, fondly. "If you will stay near me, you can still be my comfort."—"But not in the same way or to the same extent," said Katharine. "I cannot live near you,—I must at least be two miles from you,—I can only see you occasionally as a visitor; I shall have no power to interfere, however I may perceive things wanting for your comfort.

If I do more, I shall excite jealousy and ill-feeling in the person who may be your attendant; for I could not speak with any authority, as a friend in your own rank, or a relation, might. I shall have no office, and no duties, and I can therefore be of very little use to you.”—“But, could you not come and stay here?” said Jane.—“No, impossible; I could have no pretence for it, and there would be still the same difficulties in the way of assisting you. If I come at all it must be in a definite position, which shall have its own duties, and which will excite no jealousy, because every one will understand it. And, think,” she added, her face brightening with a smile, “if I were penniless, and such an offer were made me, you yourself, dear Mrs. Forbes, would be amongst the first to say that it ought not to be rejected. Has the love of the friend to whom one has clung from childhood a less claim than the necessities of self-love?”—“Oh! Katharine!” exclaimed Jane, eagerly, “I did not know before how selfish I could be.”—“It shall not be selfishness,” continued Katharine, more lightly; “if you will consent, it shall be in such a way as to make you feel that the obligation is on my side as much as on yours. You shall give me all that you would give to Laurette, and you shall have the satisfaction of feeling that you are enabling me to provide, not only for myself, but to put by something for others. I am very anxious about my brother’s prospects,” she continued, “and it would be a great comfort to me to feel that my little fortune was untouched and ready for him, or rather for his children, when they may need it. The thought has crossed my mind before, that I should like to do something of the kind. You will say yes, if only for that reason!”—Jane smiled, and said, “I cannot fancy it possible.”—“But it is agreed to,” persisted Katharine.—Jane looked up, with an expression almost of fear in her face. “What will Colonel Forbes say?” she asked.—“He will not like it,” said Katharine, quickly; “but he will be brought round,” she added. Jane’s head sank back upon her pillow, and, in a tone of despondency, which showed how great was her disappointment, she said, “Katharine, it is very, very kind, but it is better not to think about it.”—“Will you leave it to me to manage?” inquired Katharine.—Jane smiled sadly. “You cannot do every thing!”—“Not every thing,—yet more perhaps than you imagine; only will you trust me?”—“You must not make him angry,” said Jane, quickly, and instinctively her head turned to the door, as if she thought she heard him coming.—“No, indeed, you may depend upon me. I think I know him.”—“Do you?” said Jane, doubtfully; “he is very particular.”—“Yes, and not very fond of me,”

said Katharine. Jane made no answer. "But he cannot be sorry to know for certain that my brother is going from Moorlands?" continued Katharine.—"Not very, I am afraid," replied Jane, gravely.—"Then he will look upon me more favourably than before?" said Katharine.—"Yes, a little, perhaps;" and then, fearing that she had betrayed too much of her husband's sentiments, Jane added, "I dare say he always looked upon you as part of your brother."—"I think, perhaps, he did," replied Katharine; "but I mean, if I can, to make him look upon me now as part of myself. I will speak to him myself!"—Jane could not conceal her alarm. "It will never do," she exclaimed.—"Nothing else will do, if it does not," said Katharine. Jane's face was utterly desponding. "Dear Mrs. Forbes, if we are doing right," continued Katharine, "we must hope that we shall be helped through every thing."—"Yes, but you don't really know him," continued Jane.—"I know myself," replied Katharine; "may I ask to speak with him?"—Jane hesitated. "It seems madness," she said; "and can it possibly be right?"—"The right is for me to decide," replied Katharine; "if I am satisfied, that is enough."—"It is taking advantage of your affection," said Jane; "that cannot be right."—"It is making me very happy," said Katharine; and Jane smiled fondly and gratefully, and, once more leaning her head against Katharine's shoulder, murmured, "It is rest."

CHAPTER LIX.

"Miss ASHTON wishes to speak to you, sir."—Colonel Forbes was in his study, writing. "Ask her to walk in;" and Katharine entered, and seated herself, whilst he scarcely looked up from the table. The sight of her deep mourning dress, when he did lay down his pen to give her more of his attention, softened his feelings towards her; and he asked her, with something like interest, how she was, and her brother, and the children. "All pretty well, thank you, sir," said Katharine. A pause—which Katharine thought proper to break by proceeding to business; so she added,—"You must have heard of my brother's plans, sir"—"He has given me notice that he is going to quit Moorlands," said Colonel Forbes; "I do not know any thing more, except from report."—"He is going to Australia, sir, almost immediately; he thinks it will be a good investment of his money, as you said." Colonel Forbes was a little flattered, yet anxious not to have a dangerous

value attached to his words. "I don't know that I spoke definitely of any particular part of Australia ; your brother has not regularly consulted me. I hope he has had good advice." — "He has been told that he is doing wisely, by a good many people, sir," said Katharine ; "but I am afraid of it myself, and I have not liked to risk my own money, and so I have settled to stay at home." — "Oh ! indeed." Colonel Forbes looked impatient ; he did not see what concern he could have in Katharine's plans, either of going or remaining. — "And I have not much money, and I should like to increase it," said Katharine. — "Yes, very right." — Colonel Forbes thought he had discovered her object. "Have you any particular scheme in view for making more of your money ?" — "Only by work, sir," said Katharine. "I should wish to work whilst I have the power." — "Certainly, quite right," and Colonel Forbes smiled approvingly, as he always did when he saw other persons following what they considered their duty energetically. Katharine, however, was not deceived by the smile ; she knew there was a battle to come, but she went on boldly ; "I am thinking of going to service, sir." — Colonel Forbes did look then exceedingly surprised, but he was not pained ; rather, perhaps, if he had fully examined his heart, he would have found there a little lurking satisfaction : still he put on the proper air of sympathy, and said, "I am very sorry ; is it really necessary ? Does nothing else open to you ?" — "Nothing that will suit me as well, sir," said Katharine ; "there is no risk in it." — "Certainly no risk ; but have you consulted your friends ? I scarcely think they would approve of it ?" — "My brother will be out of England," replied Katharine ; "I have no other near relation to care what I do. I thought, sir, that perhaps if I were able to support myself without touching my income just yet, you might be good enough to give me some advice as to what I had better do with it. I should feel quite safe with your opinion." Katharine said this heartily ; for it was the one point in Colonel Forbes' character which she, like every one else, had always understood and estimated. His strict honour had kept up his influence, when his irritable temper and absence of sympathy might otherwise have destroyed it. Colonel Forbes also was perfectly well aware of this one bright point in his natural disposition, and certainly he did not think lightly of it. Katharine's allusion flattered his self-love, and he threw himself with some interest into her concerns, inquired how her money was invested, what interest she received for it, and many other business questions, all of which, for the time, made him feel in a degree more friendly towards her, especially when he recol-

lected that Moorlands was free, and that there would be no more trouble about John Ashton's vote. Katharine was as confidential as she could be about all her affairs, and very grateful for the advice offered her; though she quietly put aside the frequent suggestion that she would consult her comfort and respectability more by living upon her income, however small, than by trying to increase it by taking a dependent situation. She took care, however, not to give any trouble beyond mere words; for she was aware that Colonel Forbes liked talking much better than working. Her heart was trembling all the time, for she was still far removed from the real object of the interview. The conversation was drawing to a close; Colonel Forbes' tone was a little sharper, his words were fewer, and spoken more quickly — dangerous symptoms of impatience. Katharine felt that she had no time to lose; she took up her parasol, as a token that she was going, and with some hesitation said, "I had one more thing to ask you, sir, if you would not think it very impertinent." — "Pray speak," — and there was a polite bend of the head; but the movement of Colonel Forbes' fingers on the table showed, as usual, that he was a man who had no leisure to trifle away. "If I go to service," continued Katharine, "I should not like to take any inferior place; I should wish either to be a lady's maid, or a housekeeper, or something of that kind; and I heard this morning that Mrs. Forbes was likely to have a place vacant before long, as Mademoiselle Laurette was going away, and I thought I should like very much to try if I could suit it, if it were not taking a liberty to offer myself."

Colonel Forbes looked utterly confounded; an angry ejaculation of "Folly, absurdity!" rose to his lips; but Katharine stood before him so humble, simple, and honest, so exactly fitting even then the place she had proposed for herself, that he really could not bring to his mind a single objection. "Indeed! strange! I fear," he began, and then broke off and commenced again; "I could not say; it is a sudden notion." — "I am afraid it is, sir," was Katharine's quiet reply. "I would not wish to be troublesome," and again there was a movement as if she was going. He was still more puzzled by her calmness. He had a vague idea of some plot, some romantic folly, as he would have called it, of his wife's; but this extreme self-possession did not favour the notion, yet he said angrily, as if determined to fathom the depths of the mystery, "Stop: may I beg you, Miss Ashton, if you can spare me one minute longer. Does Mrs. Forbes know of this plan of yours?" — "Yes, sir, I mentioned it to her just now." — "And she approved, of course?" he said, with some irony in

his tone. — "She was good enough to say she would be willing, sir; but she did not know whether you would like it, and then I said I would ask." Still more irritating to Colonel Forbes' excitability. After all there was no mystery. He was quite silent, and his attitude and expression, as he threw himself back in his chair, were by no means encouraging. "I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time, sir," said Katharine; "there is no hurry for an answer. Perhaps you would be good enough to speak to Mrs. Forbes, and I might call again. I can work pretty well," she added, "and I have been accustomed to read out, and I can sit up at night." He fixed his eyes upon her with an expression of bewilderment. She was so entirely the lady's maid offering herself for a situation, that he had a difficulty in thinking of her as Katharine Ashton. He spoke to her again as in her new character, and said, "Mrs. Forbes will require a great deal of attention; are you strong?" — "Yes, sir, very." — "And you say you can work well?" — "Yes, sir, I have been always accustomed to make my own dresses." He considered for a few moments longer — what else could he ask? The question of wages crossed his mind, but it was rejected by an instinct of unfitness. "You shall hear either from me or from Mrs. Forbes on the subject; it is impossible to give an immediate answer." — "Thank you, sir," and Katharine curtsied and moved to the door. Something in her manner brought back vividly to Colonel Forbes the remembrance that she was still Katharine Ashton, and his parting bow was, if not cordial, at least courteous.

Katharine closed the door behind her, and felt that once again she breathed freely. What was to be done next was a perplexity. She did not dare go upstairs again to Jane, lest Colonel Forbes might find her there and be annoyed; yet she did very earnestly wish to give her some caution as to what she was to say. Jane's affection might, she was sure, carry her beyond the bounds of prudence. If Colonel Forbes' jealousy were excited, the plan was hopeless. Now he evidently looked upon her wish merely as the desire to seize upon the first situation which offered itself. She was already in his eyes his wife's maid, entitled to just the same degree of attention as any other person similarly circumstanced, and Katharine knew him well enough to be quite certain that she could only be of real use to Jane by retaining that position. If Colonel Forbes once felt himself under restraint from having her in the house, there would be no chance of his allowing her to stay. In her difficulty she had recourse to her friend the housekeeper, and proceeded to her room to ask for a sheet of

note paper, and a pen and ink, that she might write, as she said, one line to Mrs. Forbes, whom she did not wish to disturb again. "Dear Mrs. Forbes," the note began. Katharine felt as if she ought to put "Dear Madam;" but that would have vexed Jane, and she wrote, therefore, as she had been accustomed. "I have seen Colonel Forbes, and told him that I wish to have a situation in order that I may put by my income for the present. He did not seem so much inclined to object to my waiting upon you as I had feared. I told him what I could do, and he said I should hear from him or from you on the subject. I was afraid it might seem impertinent if I said how much pleasure it would give me to do any thing for you, so he does not know any thing except that I wish for employment. Perhaps that is all it is good to say, for indeed I only wish to be allowed to be your maid. I hope you will tell me every thing that I can do for you just as if I was Mlle. Laurette; that will be the only way to make me comfortable.

"Your obliged and respectful

"KATHARINE ASHTON."

Katharine went home, and the first thing which caught her eye when she went to her room was the envelope of Charles Ronaldson's note lying upon her dressing-table. Then, and not till then, in the hurry and excitement of her feelings since her resolution had been taken, did she fully feel what she had done; and then also a terrible misgiving crossed her mind that perhaps she had made a mistake.

So great a sacrifice it might be! for once entered upon Jane's service, she could not foresee when, or under what circumstances, she would be at liberty to leave it. The rejected scruples returned, and with them the pang of acknowledging for the first time how deeply her happiness depended upon the certainty of Charles Ronaldson's affection. She longed to have some other opinion upon her decision, her own reason seemed for the time insufficient. Yet there was one fact to which again and again she could recur with comfort. If she had decided differently, she certainly would not have been satisfied; even if she had waited till after her interview with Charles, which was the first thought that had suggested itself to her, there would have been a lurking consciousness of selfishness which must have rendered her wretched; and, whatever might be the result of that interview, Jane's claim upon her could not be affected by it. It would have been postponing a duty with a secret wish to be prevented from carrying it out, and this could not be honest.

There was a weary struggle of conflicting feelings, but peace, or something which resembled it, came at last. Katharine had done what was most single-hearted, and in that conviction she could rest satisfied that He, who was ordering the events of her life, would overrule all for good, even those which seemed most untoward.

CHAPTER LX.

AND the morrow came, and Katharine awoke very early, with the dim consciousness of something painful, undecided, important—something which was to render that day different from all other days. She might have striven to hide from herself before the state of her own heart, but she could do so no longer. The barrier raised by her own hand between herself and freedom had been the means of discovering it, and now every other hope or fear was lost in the agonising doubt whether, after all, she had not been deceiving herself as to the extent of Charles Ronaldson's feeling. If he really loved her still, then come what might—delay, separation, trial under any form—it could be thankfully borne. If he did not—Katharine's mind was strong, but so also were her affections, and she turned from the thought with the prayer, that "as her day so might her strength be."

There was a great deal of conversation at breakfast about plans and business; and Katharine felt strangely put aside when she found how every thing could be arranged, and was being managed without her. Every thing important that is; for Selina, as usual, made her very useful in minor ways, and provided her with employment not only for that day, but for many days to come. Both she and John seemed to think now that there was only one thing in the world worth Katharine's consideration, or indeed that of any other person, and that was their own emigration. They knew that Charles Ronaldson was expected, but they fully believed that he was coming entirely on their account; and John boastfully went through the convincing reasons which he meant to bring forward to prove indisputably that he was right in his schemes, and that they must answer. As to any idea connecting him with Katharine, it either was destroyed by the sense of his own overwhelming interests, or if it did cross his mind, it was thought of as an unimportant possibility.

Katharine occupied herself unceasingly all the morning, as much

to drive away distracting thoughts, as because she had really a great deal to do. Charles could not arrive till two o'clock; he might not come till five. The morning seemed interminable. She was every minute expecting a note from Maplestead, and longing to receive it, feeling what a comfort it would be to have her mind definitely settled upon that one important point. But it was not till one o'clock that a note was brought her. It was opened with nervous haste. She had but little doubt as to its contents; and yet when she read, "Dear Katharine,—Colonel Forbes has said 'yes.' How shall I ever thank you enough?"—the note dropped from her hand, and she felt as if her fate was sealed. Still, perhaps, upon the whole, she was relieved. Suspense at such a time was worse than any certainty; and her active, straightforward mind instantly turned to the task of driving away any morbid fancies, and looking to her position truly. Bound she was unquestionably, but not bound for ever. If Jane were to rally again, she might be able to leave her comfortably in the course of a few months; if not, at least there could be no regret in having fulfilled a sacred promise at the expense of present personal feeling. At any rate, it was not well to exaggerate what she was doing, either for her own sake or for Jane's. To do so would tend to make her conceited as to herself, and exacting as to the return of gratitude she might expect. A lesson of simply doing right for the present, and trusting the future, was put before her; and, difficult though it might be, she was resolved, with God's help, to bear it.

Two o'clock! and dinner was over, and John preparing to drive Selina into Rilworth. Katharine felt very thankful they were going; she did not once remind them that Charles Ronaldson might arrive in their absence, lest it should induce them to stay. Selina came down stairs dressed for going out, and impatient because the chaise was not at the door. "I hear the rattle of the wheels," said John, looking out of the window.—Katharine heard wheels too, but the sound was much more like the rumble of a fly.—"It is not the chaise, it is a cart going down the lane," said Selina; and Katharine felt as if they must both have known what foolish thoughts had been in her mind.—"I don't think it's any thing going down the lane, but coming up," observed John; an observation which made Selina put her head out very far to see whether it was correct.—"A fly, sure enough! with one man in it."—"Charles Ronaldson," said John.—"What a bore! I must go to Rilworth, if I walk," said Selina. "I shall not let any Charles Ronaldson keep me at home; Katharine must entertain

him."—They both turned round and looked at her, and laughed; but Katharine was not half as angry with them as with herself, for she felt her face become crimson to the temples. The fly drove up to the door, and there was a short pause whilst the driver was being paid. "I must go out and receive him, I suppose," said John, lingering as if he had not quite made up his mind what he ought to do.—"Mind that I must go into Rilworth!" was Selina's rejoinder, as the door closed behind him. "So provoking!" she added, turning to Katharine; "I made sure he would have come by the five o'clock train."—"Yes, very strange," said Katharine.—"Not so much strange as provoking," observed Selina, shortly. "There's nothing strange in a man's coming at two o'clock, that I know of. Why, Katharine, what a boggle you are making there!" She took up Katharine's work—a frock for little Clara.—"Am I?" and Katharine felt ashamed to discover that she had been sewing the sleeves together. She began to unpick them quickly, but without looking up.—"They are a desperately long time," said Selina, going to the door; but at that very moment it was opened, and Charles Ronaldson entered, followed by John. Katharine's work fell from her hand, and she stood up, but she was half-hidden by Selina.—"You are come early," said Selina, shaking hands with tolerable heartiness.—"Yes, thank you; but ——" He looked round, and, leaving his sentence unfinished, turned to Katharine. She felt that her hand was icy cold, her manner miserably stiff; but her head swam and her eyes were dizzy, and she sat down again and took up her work. He gave her one fixed, penetrating glance, and then spoke again to Selina: "You are going out I see, and you must not let me interfere with you. I know you must be wonderfully busy."—"Thank you, but we must look after you first," said John. "You have not dined, I know. Selly, you must take care of him."—"There's not much in the house, I am afraid," said Selina, "except cold meat."—"Shall I go and see?" inquired Katharine, in a very quiet, low voice.—"Thank you, if you would; that might be the best plan, as we are forced to go into Rilworth. You won't think us very rude, I hope, Mr. Ronaldson?"—Katharine had laid aside her work and was standing at the door. Charles went up to her: "Pray, Miss Ashton, don't trouble yourself. I don't in the least care what I have; bread and cheese will be as good as any thing. Please stay," he added, in a lower tone.—Katharine said something which was scarcely intelligible, and left the room. Selina called after her: "There can be a mutton chop ready in no time, Kate, if you'll just be good enough to see about it. Or, ~~are~~

you grown particular after your illness, Mr. Ronaldson?" she added.—He smiled, and said he was afraid his particularity consisted in not having much appetite; but his journey would do him good, no doubt—change always did. There was a silence of some seconds. John did not venture to allude to business; he was afraid to begin the subject, for Selina's patience was nearly exhausted. Charles leant back in a chair and seemed tired, as if even that short conversation had been an effort. "The chaise at last," exclaimed Selina, and she went up to the window and began to scold the boy for his delay.—"It seems dreadfully inhospitable to run away and leave you," observed John; "but we shall be back again by six o'clock."—"What? I beg your pardon; pray don't think about it," exclaimed Charles, starting up from his reverie.—John laughed. "Dreaming, I declare! Well, you may sleep to your heart's content, if you will wake up to have a chat with me by-and-by. Don't let Kate starve you; she is a little inclined that way." Charles made no answer, but insisted upon going to the door, and helping Mrs. John Ashton into the chaise, and arranging her cloak comfortably for her.—"Good-bye, Mr. Ronaldson; good-bye, my dear fellow; make yourself quite at home; we must be back by six;"—and John and Selina drove off, and Charles Ronaldson, with a face of deadly paleness, leant for a moment against the porch, and then passing his hand across his forehead, as if to drive away harassing thoughts, returned to the parlour.

No Katharine was there; he sat down in the arm-chair, started up, paced the room, re-seated himself, looked out of the window, walked the apartment again with even rapid strides, and at length, leaning his forehead upon the mantelpiece, actually groaned in the agony of his suspense. The door opened very gently,—Katharine and a little maid-servant came in together. The maid carried a small tray, and Katharine moved the books from the table to make room for it. "It is a poached egg, Mr. Ronaldson; I thought you might like that first; and will you take wine or beer?"—"Nothing, thank you, only water." He did not move to the table, his eye followed the servant-girl, as she placed the chair for him, and lingered to put things, as she considered, tidy. "The mutton chop will be ready in a few minutes," said Katharine, preparing to leave the room again, "will you ring for it?" He could bear this no longer, and, placing himself before her, he said, "Perhaps you would allow me a few minutes' conversation first."—"Will that do, Miss?" said the servant, looking around her with a pleased air.—"Yes, thank you, Fanny, very well."

—“And I will ring,” exclaimed Charles, following her to the door, and closing it.—It was re-opened: “Will the gentleman like whole potatoes or mashed?”—“I will ring; yes, I will ring,” was the incoherent reply, and the door was once more shut. He came back to Katharine, who was sitting down, for her knees trembled so that she could not stand. “Miss Ashton, forgive me, I have been very impatient.”—Katharine smiled faintly.—“Very impatient!” he repeated; “but there may be an excuse.—I have not thanked you for your note.”—“I was glad to send it,” said Katharine.—“Thank you, you don’t know what it was to me.” He paused.—Katharine looked for her work. It was her resource against nervousness; he thought she was wishing to leave him, and his voice changed. “I beg your pardon, I am detaining you; I see you are busy.”—“Oh! no; not at all, I have nothing to do; my time is at my own disposal,” said Katharine.—Tears gathered in her eyes, and he saw them. “That must be very sad to you when you have been so occupied. May I be allowed to say how much I have felt for you?”—“It has been a great comfort to me to think of it,” replied Katharine. She raised her eyes to his gratefully, and a look of confidence and hope passed over his face as he said, “It could never be so great a comfort to you to receive, as to me to offer help of any kind. I have so feared that I might be intruding.”—“That could never be,” said Katharine, “after years of friendship.”—He repeated the word friendship with an accent of pain.—“You do not reject it, I hope,” said Katharine, trying to smile.—“Reject it? Heaven forbid! but, Miss Ashton, it was friendship years ago.”—“Yes,” was Katharine’s only reply, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely hold her needle. He hesitated, was about to speak, then checked himself again, and said abruptly: “Are promises made in haste never to be broken under any circumstances?”—“That is not a question for me to decide,” said Katharine.—“Promises,” he continued, “rash promises, may they not be altered by time?”—Katharine was silent.—“May they not be retracted by mutual consent?” he added more eagerly.—“Yes, certainly,” replied Katharine.—He caught her hand: “Miss Ashton, eight years ago I made a promise to you—a promise that upon one subject I never would trouble you again; is it still binding?” He almost gasped for breath. Katharine’s cheek was colourless, her eyes were suddenly dimmed, she thought of Jane. Oh! if she could only tell him at once! She must, she was bound in honour, for it might influence him: “Say that I may speak,” he repeated, “or, if the obstacle still exists——”—“There is an obstacle,” said Katharine, interrupting him quickly.—He let her hand fall, and,

sinking back into a chair, covered his face with his hands and exclaimed, "Fool that I was to deceive myself."—Katharine, continued hurriedly, "I will not pretend to misunderstand you, Mr. Ronaldson, but I would wish to be quite open."—"And tell me that you are, as you always have been, indifferent to me," he said, with a bitter calmness; "I thank you for it."—"Not so," said Katharine, and the blood mantled in her cheek; "but I must be true, honest, for your sake as for my own; I am not in the position you imagine, I am not free."—"He started from his seat, and gazed at her wildly.—"I am not free," repeated Katharine, with forced calmness. "I have accepted a situation of what some may term dependence; how long it may last I cannot say or think; but it is binding upon me."—"I cannot understand," he exclaimed, whilst a mingled expression of bewilderment and relief crossed his features. "Dependence! upon whom? and binding! what can be binding as love? Love," he repeated, and he seized her hand, and kept it without resistance, "which has lived through long years upon the fragments of hope, which has never changed or faltered, which even in its despair would rather have chosen death than forgetfulness? Yes, Katharine," he continued impetuously, "next to my duty to God, you alone have been my object through the whole course of my life. You rejected me in words, but I left you only to love the more. You rejected me in manner when I came to you in your hour of sorrow, and you received me with the kindly indifference which is worse than enmity; and I returned to my home to treasure up your image in my heart, and devote all my energies to your service. You withdrew from me more; even your cold letters of business all but ceased, and when compelled to apply to me, you gave me nothing beyond the common-place words due to the most ordinary acquaintance; and I humbled myself by seeking to learn from others what I dared not ask yourself. Your brother told me he believed you to be indifferent, and still, still my love lived, nourished by the shadows of my own imagination. In life you have been my guiding star, in the prospect of death the lingering earthly tie which it was agony to sever, and now you speak to me of claims more binding. Katharine, if there be truth in heaven, or love on earth, there is no claim so binding as mine must be, if only you will admit it. What God hath joined together man cannot, dare not, put asunder."—Katharine's tears fell fast; he pressed her hand to his lips, and added more gently, "Is there no word of hope for me?"—Katharine raised her eyes to his unshrinkingly, and answered, "You shall yourself be the judge, if only you will hear me. Think of

me not as Katharine Ashton, holding an independent position in the world, and free to follow my own will, but as engaged in the service of another — one whose claims dated before yours," she added, attempting to smile. "I am Mrs. Forbes' attendant — bound, pledged to her. Stay," she continued, seeing that he was about to interrupt her; "it sounds an absurdity; you think it a wild romantic fancy; it is not that. Under the circumstances of the family I might probably have formed a similar determination, if no such duty had presented itself, but it has come before me with the most urgent claim. Mrs. Forbes is ill, unhappy, I must not say more; I owe her a debt of gratitude for years of kindness, far more than kindness; it was she that brought me fully to the service of God. To leave her now would be cruelty; to think of really helping her except in the position I have undertaken would be folly. I have promised to be her servant, and that promise I must keep before all others. Simply and entirely her servant," she added, "bound to wait upon her, willing to accept her wages, and pledged to remain with her so long as my services are essential. This is my situation; you will see at once how much in many ways it may lead you to alter your views."

During Katharine's explanation, Charles had gradually become paler and paler, and as she concluded the last sentence, and turned to him, expecting a reply, he sat down and buried his face in his hands. Katharine saw the ashy hue of his forehead and was frightened. A glass of water was on the table, and she put it to his lips. He leant his head back in the chair, and his eyes closed. After a few moments he looked up again, and, smiling, said, "I had a horrible dream that you had left me, but you are still near." — "Near, if you will let me be," said Katharine, timidly. — He gazed at her with an expression of reverence mingled with the most intense affection, and motioning to her to sit down by him, said, "I did not know I could have been so weak, but it is from happiness." — "And you do not care?" said Katharine. — He drew a long breath, and answered earnestly, "Care—when you give me hope? God be thanked for the mercy I have so little deserved." — "But you understand it—you understand it quite," repeated Katharine, anxiously; "that I am really to be her servant; that Colonel Forbes, that every one will look upon me as such; that I cannot leave her, for it may be very long; I trust you understand." — "That we are one," he said, interrupting her eagerly: "in life and in death that we are one; let me hear it from your own lips;" and Katharine, though her voice trembled, put her hand in his, and answered clearly and audibly, "One, if still you will have it so."

CHAPTER LXL

A new phase in Katharine Ashton's life. In a little room, adjoining Jane's dressing-room at Maplestead, she was seated at work. It was an autumn day, clear but cold; a fire blazed on the hearth, the sun shone brightly into the apartment; the view without over the park, with a glimpse of the long beech avenue, was quieting, perhaps imposing in its stateliness; the view within—the work-table, the books, the prints covering the walls—was cheerful and very home-like. Katharine worked as diligently now, when she was making frocks for little Philip and Lucy, as she had formerly done for her own little niece and nephew. She was a person always to put her heart into what she was doing, not for the sake of the work, but of Him who gave it her to do. Yet there was pleasure also, great pleasure in working for Jane; in feeling, as Katharine could not but feel, that she was able to soothe her in hours of suffering, and help to restore peace to her mind. She had been at Maplestead now three weeks, but the life had become so natural to her that she might have imagined it rather three months. She looked back upon the time preceding, full as it was of excitement, pain, and business, as upon the disturbed memories of some troubled period of childhood or of youth; so separated it seemed from the quiet tenor of her present existence. Yet, whilst she was thus calmly employed in that still, solitary little room at Maplestead, John, and Selina, and the children (who had become so dear to her that separation from them was as the severance of a limb from the body), were sailing over the wide seas, to seek their fortunes in a distant land, carrying with them the last link which bound her to the sunny days of childhood. Sometimes Katharine allowed herself to recall all that had passed in detail. There were many lessons to be learnt from it of faith and gratitude. She had been spared much, even when expecting to suffer most. First doubtless, owing to her engagement. That happiness increased day by day, though many might have murmured at the restraint which circumstances imposed upon her. One of Katharine's chief wishes was that it should not be made public; that indeed no one should be told of it, except Mrs. Ronaldson, and her friends Mr. and Mrs. Reeves; the former, of course, had a claim of duty; with regard to the latter, Katharine felt that guidance and counsel might be necessary to her in her untried position, and she was anxious to put them in possession of the

facts, which would enable them to direct her rightly. Her brother and Selina were to be told immediately before they sailed, but Katharine very naturally shrank from putting herself in the power of Selina's raillery, and was aware also that she could in no way depend upon her discretion; and it was discretion which just then was most needed. If Mrs. Forbes were to learn how she was circumstanced, the dread of possibly interfering with her happiness would, Katharine knew, in all probability so distress her, that the plan for her benefit must fall to the ground. And above all things it was most important just then to keep her mind at rest. She was so shaken by her last illness, that any thing like excitement, whether painful or pleasurable, might have most fatal consequences. John and Selina were therefore informed that Katharine was going to Maplestead for a time, and Katharine said also that she was to wait upon Mrs. Forbes; but they were too busy to realise the actual situation she was to hold. They believed she would be there as a kind of temporary nurse, from kindness; and this was so far a relief to John, that he did not feel he was leaving his sister without the protection of a friend.

Yet the secret might probably never have been kept but for the necessity of Charles Ronaldson's leaving Moorlands the day after his explanation. The parting was very painful; but Katharine felt more for Charles than for herself. She had duty and affection for Jane to support her, he had nothing but her assurance that the step she had taken was a duty. Yet he never attempted to alter her resolution; he never even complained when she cautioned him as to self-restraint and reserve until their engagement could be made public, and entreated him not to attempt to see her at Maplestead, but to give her careful notice when he was coming into the neighbourhood, that she might arrange to meet him elsewhere. His mind seemed to have found complete rest for the time in the certainty of Katharine's affection; whether this feeling would bear a long ordeal remained to be proved. Katharine, however, did not try him unnecessarily. She made him see that her promise to Jane need not necessarily delay their marriage longer than would have been necessary from other circumstances. Respect for her mother's memory would, at all events, have postponed it for many months; and she willingly allowed that the engagement gave him a claim upon her to which she was bound to attend; and that she ought on no account to allow a fancied necessity to interfere with it. Katharine was not a person to make herself an unnecessary martyr, and then, as so many do, look round for admiration. She wished to do what she felt to be right,

but she did not desire to exaggerate duties. For the future Charles was to be always her first consideration ; and now all that seemed needed, both for him and herself, was patience and a mutual resolution that love should not make them selfish.

With this feeling they separated, but to meet again before long. Katharine worked for her brother and Selina up to the last moment of their remaining at Moorlands, and then accompanied them to London, where her cousins in Great Russell Street gave them a welcome and a home. Then came ten days of incessant harass, and great pain, which would have seemed to Katharine scarcely endurable, but that Charles managed to be in London at the same time, and shared all her cares. It was then that John was told of her engagement, and in the fulness of his satisfaction he evinced a warmth of affection, which Katharine had before supposed to be entirely lost to her. Selina also gave her cordial thanks for past kindness and wishes for future happiness ; and when at last the bitter moment of separation arrived, and Katharine's heart seemed well-nigh breaking, as the children clung to her, and entreated her to follow them, she was soothed by hearing John whisper in her ear that they might carry with them good spirits and bright hopes, but they were leaving their greatest treasure behind them.

They were pleasant last words to treasure in the memory, after all the hard ones which had preceded them, and peacefully though very mournfully they lingered in Katharine's recollection, as she stood watching the crowded ship, and waving her handkerchief, till all individual objects were lost in the distance.

The world was very desolate to Katharine at that moment, even with Charles by her side. Perhaps she realised then even more than before, the barrier that she had raised between herself and immediate freedom. Jane was needing her at Maplestead, and it was necessary that she should keep her engagement ; Charles had urgent business claiming his attention in the North ; and the very day that the ship sailed for Australia, they separated once more at the railway station, when to meet again neither could say, but trying to persuade themselves that constant correspondence would at least soothe the aching regret, which both felt would only cease when they should be at liberty to be always together.

And Katharine was now Mrs. Forbes' lady's maid. How strange it seemed to every one ! how much more strange than to herself ! She might have appeared a most consummate actress, for every part in life which she undertook became real to her. She could answer Jane's bell, speak of her as her mistress, and

receive her instructions; she could stand aside respectfully for Colonel Forbes to pass, listen with a most unmoved countenance to his hasty words, and deliver his orders. She could assist the housekeeper if required, in domestic arrangements, and consult with her as to little plans for Jane's comfort. She could in fact do every duty which might at any time be required of a lady's maid, not only without causing any feeling of awkwardness to others, but actually without feeling it herself. She was Katharine Ashton through every thing, and not to be altered by any outward change of circumstances. It was impossible to offend her, she had no false dignity to make her vulnerable. If Crewe gave himself unpleasant airs, it was a cause of regret for him, but not for herself; if some of her old Rilworth acquaintances looked at her with pity and perhaps a little mixture of pride, she could smile at their total misconception of her feelings. But she could not be annoyed with them, because it was not possible they should understand her. She had learnt to live so entirely above the world that whenever a thought crossed her mind of having lowered herself, or that others would think she had done so, she could put it aside in an instant, by considering herself not as working for man, but God; not as a member of a human society, but as a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God. Doubtless there was much of this to be attributed to the disposition born with her. Some persons are naturally much more simple than others, but like all other graces, simplicity is unquestionably to be acquired; and Katharine had laboured with the one talent which it had pleased God to bestow upon her, until through His grace it had become five.

A bell rang, and Katharine laid down her work and went to answer it. Jane was in her own morning room, the scene of that eventful arrangement of the books which had caused Katharine so much annoyance. Jane had rallied very considerably in the the last few weeks; indeed ever since Katharine's offer of being with her. Her mind seemed to rest upon the idea as a stay, and any little inconveniences which before had fretted her, were put aside with the thought, "When Katharine comes, all will be right." It was very pleasant to see the smile which passed over her features when Katharine entered; it told of such thankful trust; yet it was followed just now with a sigh of weariness. "I rang, Katharine, to ask if you would be kind enough to see if any one is going into Rilworth. I want some note paper; just look," and she pointed to a rather closely-written paper, "this is to be copied six times." — "I am afraid it will tire you, ma'am, very

much," said Katharine. "Must it all be done to-day?" — "To-day or to-morrow if I can; that is, Colonel Forbes did not exactly ask me, but he said he should like to have it done." — "Sitting up will make your side ache, ma'am. Don't you think you had better lie down a little and rest now?" Katharine moved to the sofa and arranged the pillow. "You would make me so very lazy, Katharine," said Jane; but she put her head back and owned that it ached rather. "I do not think you have finished the book which you said Colonel Forbes wished you to read, ma'am. Might I fetch it and finish it to you?" — "I had quite forgotten it," exclaimed Jane, quickly, and in a tone of alarm. "Yes, pray get it; only what shall I do about the papers?" — "I suppose they are private," said Katharine. — "Oh! no; they are merely some political circulars to be sent to a few people." — "It would be very easy for me to copy them if I might be allowed," said Katharine. Jane looked a little inclined to agree, but after a moment's thought, shook her head, and said it would not do. — "Then perhaps I had better go and order the note paper," said Katharine. "Mr. Crewe is going into Rilworth I know." — "There are a good many commissions in my memorandum book," said Jane, "if you don't think he will be put out by having to attend to them." — Katharine smiled, and said she would try to soften his heart; and once more putting Jane's pillow in a comfortable position, and placing a little table with a work-basket by her side, she went away, Jane entreating her as she closed the door not on any account to forget the book. Katharine went down to the housekeeper's room. She was looking over the linen, and adding to the inventory, and goodhumoured though she usually was, yet on this occasion she was a little inclined to be cross. Katharine inquired if she could tell where Mr. Crewe was likely to be found. "Indeed, Miss Ashton, I don't know — four, five, six — I'm sure there's one of the dusters missing." Katharine picked it up from the floor. "Thank you; that's one set right. Just give me those others on the round table, will you?" — Katharine did as she was directed, and inquired if all the linen she saw there was to be entered in the book. "To be sure it is, every bit, and a good long day's work it will be for me to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day too." — "You had better let me come and help you by-and-by," said Katharine, "I am used to writing." — "Well, I must say that would be very good-natured of you. It is a terrible job if one has not help, and the upper housemaid has a desperate headache, so I began without her." — "I will come, if you like, when Mrs. Forbes goes out for her drive," said Katharine.

"Did you say you had seen Mr. Crewe lately?" — "Not for the last half-hour; he was in here scolding something about one of the grooms; but I haven't seen him since. Let James go and look for him." — "No, I won't trouble any one, thank you," replied Katharine. "I dare say I shall find him in the servants' hall. Shall you be ready for me about half-past two o'clock? I think Mrs. Forbes will go out about that time to-day. She was too late yesterday." — "If the Colonel means to drive her she won't get out before half-past three," said the housekeeper; "but that's not your concern nor mine, Miss Ashton. Come when you will, I shall be glad to have your help." — Katharine proceeded to the servants' hall, meeting on the way a kitchen-maid, a poor girl whose mother was dying in the village. "Susan, I saw your mother this morning," she said, "when I took Miss Lucy and Master Philip out for a walk. I could not stop an instant; but she was a little better, and sent her love to you." — "Thank you, miss, very much;" and the kitchen maid dropped a curtsy to the grand lady's maid, and thought how different she was from Mlle. Laurette. — "You have not seen Mr. Crewe anywhere, have you?" asked Katharine. — "No, miss; couldn't I go and look for him for you?" — "I won't trouble you," was again Katharine's answer; and the politeness was as strange and as pleasant to the little kitchen-maid as the sympathy.

Mr. Crewe was found in the servants' hall, reading the *Times*, the only difference between him and his master in this respect was that his newspapers were always a day old. He had just the same nonchalant air on these occasions as Colonel Forbes, and did not suffer himself to be at all more disturbed by the knowledge that any person was wishing to speak to him. "I think, Mr. Crewe, you are going to Rilworth this afternoon," said Katharine, standing at the door. — "I think, Miss Ashton, I am." — "There is a list of commissions, which perhaps you will be good enough to attend to for Mrs. Forbes and your master. The books Colonel Forbes would wish to have particularly this evening. I will leave the list on the table. The things are to be sent to the Bear, and the carrier will bring them over." And before Crewe had time to reply either civilly or uncivilly, Katharine was gone. How Crewe hated her! she never was cross, or flighty, or troublesome; she never came in his way, or even asked him to do disagreeable things. Even now she had taken away the only cause of complaint he could find as regarded the commissions. Laurette had always insisted upon his loading himself with brown paper parcels. Now that Katharine was come, they were either given

in charge to one of the other servants, or sent by the carrier. He had no opportunity of teasing her, except when they dined together in the housekeeper's room, and then Katharine kept up such a pleasant conversation with Mrs. Brown, and was so civilly indifferent to himself, that he never could tell whether she noticed his manner, and certainly he never felt that he had any power over her. It was intensely irritating to be forced to respect her, when hitherto the chief amusement in his rather dull life at Maplestead had been alternately tormenting and flattering the unfortunate lady's maids who were in attendance upon Mrs. Forbes. Katharine was perfectly unapproachable, and Crewe's dislike increased in exact proportion to the approbation of the rest of the household.

Katharine of necessity reciprocated the feeling to a certain extent; Crewe was the only really disagreeable person she was obliged in any way to associate with, and she could never feel thoroughly at ease when he was present; but happily for her she saw nothing of him except at meal-times. Her fear of him was very different from that with which she regarded Colonel Forbes, who, whatever might be his irritability of temper, never forgot that he was a gentleman, and that as such all women had a certain claim upon his protection. The pain he caused her was for Jane, not for herself, and certainly Jane was the greater sufferer. Colonel Forbes might be haughty to Katharine, but it would have lowered his dignity in his own eyes to be pettish with her, as he was with his wife. Katharine, however, took great care never to come in his way, and never, if it could be avoided, to remind him of former days. The tone which she had adopted, or rather which had been natural to her, when first she proposed to enter his service, was always retained. It was that which had weighed with him when agreeing to receive her. He had said to Jane when first the subject was discussed between them, that Miss Ashton seemed to know her position. He was afraid she might be romantic, but she was of a good steady age, and had seen enough of the world to know that such folly would not do for every-day life; and if she really was in reduced circumstances, why it might be as well for her to enter a service like theirs, which was of a superior kind. He had no objection to her trying the place, if she did not give herself airs; if she knew how to keep her proper distance; but he could have no sentimentalities. If she came to Maplestead, she would be Mrs. Forbes' maid, and she must be content to be treated as such. He worked himself up into a fit of indignation; — as if Katharine had ever expressed

a wish to be any thing else! and he touched his wife's sensitive feelings to the quick, and made her feel as though it would be impossible to allow Katharine to accept a situation in which there would be such jealousy of her every action. But when, yielding to this feeling, she began to suggest obstacles, Colonel Forbes turned completely round, blamed her for encouraging Katharine in pride, insisted upon it that in her circumstances the higher grades of service offered the best possible prospects of happiness, and at length from the mere spirit of contradiction, did the very thing which Jane and Katharine were anxious he should do.

Katharine went to his room to fetch the book which Jane wanted. She knocked at the door, was told to come in, and found Colonel Forbes busied in conversation with Mr. George Andrews. Very much perplexed was Mr. Andrews whenever he met Katharine now. She had become an amphibious animal, and he was always under the fear that by allowing her to approach too near, she might drag him from the position which he had attained, and in which he by no means felt himself secure. His good-nature suggested to him to shake hands, his dignity warned him that it would be safer to bow, and dignity gained the victory; and most solemn was the reverence he bestowed upon her. "Might I take this book, sir, for Mrs. Forbes?" inquired Katharine, seeing the missing volume on the table.—"That book? let me see;" he took it from her, and turned to Mr. Andrews. "It is worth reading. I advise you to get it, Andrews. It treats the question of reform more cleverly than any thing I have seen yet. Has not your mistress finished it, Miss Ashton?"—"No, sir, she was wishing to do so."—Mr. Andrews expressed a great desire to peruse the volume, and turned over the pages, murmuring to himself as he read the heads of the different chapters; "Very important—highly interesting—new views," &c.—Katharine, the most patient of attendants, stood at the door, waiting till he had done with it. "I thought your mistress was to have finished it this morning," said Colonel Forbes.—"She was going to do so, sir, directly. I think she has not many pages to finish, she read a good deal last night before she went to bed."—"Mrs. Forbes is a politician I see," said Mr. Andrews; but Colonel Forbes never liked personal remarks upon his wife of any kind, and did not reply to the observation, but merely said, impatiently to Katharine, "Well! you may take it, Miss Ashton, only tell Mrs. Forbes it must be sent away this afternoon."—"My mistress is going to read it directly, sir, after she has finished some writing she has to do."—"Tell her to put away her writing, unless she doesn't

care about the book, which I suppose is the case," he murmured pettishly, to himself. "I think my mistress would like to finish the book, sir, if I might take it to her; the writing was only copying."—"Copying! oh! yes, I remember. Circulars, Andrews just a few of them for our own private friends. Here is one!"—Mr. Andrews perused the circular diligently, and Colonel Forbes continued, "It would be well to have a good many more, there is nothing like pre-occupying the ground."—"Nothing like it," repeated Mr. Andrews. "Excellent, indeed," he added, laying the papers on the table, "wonderfully to the point; really Colonel you do manage to put things in the most striking way."—Colonel Forbes winced a little. Even after so many years of acquaintance, he could never quite get over the familiarity of Mr. Andrews' manner. "It is merely a simple explanation of my views," he said carelessly; "but it may be as well to let people know them. Mrs. Forbes has six of these papers written, you say?" he added, speaking to Katharine.—"She will have by post time, sir. If there was nothing private in them, perhaps I might be allowed to help."—A gleam of satisfaction crossed Colonel Forbes' countenance. "Well, perhaps, yes, I think that is a good notion. Then I shall reckon upon twelve?"—Katharine was not in the least prepared for this but she assented, and that willingly. Any thing to save Jane the weariness of so much writing! "And if my mistress has time, sir, she may finish the book too?" she said.—"Of course, only don't forget to let me have it by post time."—Katharine retreated, first making a curtsy to Mr. Andrews. A little compunction touched him then, and he inquired if she had any news of her brother.—"None, sir, yet, thank you; except from the pilot who took the vessel down the channel."—"No tidings of poor Mrs. John," said Mr. Andrews, laughing; "I wonder how she and sea-sickness will agree."—A short cough from Colonel Forbes recalled him to his dignity. He certainly never was safe when he ventured beyond its protection; and he drew back in a moment, and with a patronising "Good morning, Miss Ashton, I am glad to see you looking so well and comfortable," retreated into the safe sphere of politics.

CHAPTER LXII.

THAT copying of the circular was but a trifle, but it worked considerable effects. Colonel Forbes had never felt quite comfortable when making his wife write for him. He knew the attitude was painful after a time, and he was not at all sure that it was good for her general health; but the question was between his comfort and hers, and as usual hers was to give way.

His conscience was relieved by Katharine's offer, and he took great advantage of it—more a great deal than he had any right to do, more than any other person in Katharine's situation would probably have been willing to bear. But love makes all things smooth, and Katharine would have laboured ten times more to save Jane trouble, or give her a moment's pleasure. And it was very useful too, in other ways, to be thus brought more in contact with Colonel Forbes. It gave her almost insensibly to herself, and certainly to him, a share in his interests, and so softened his feeling towards her. He did not look at her now in an antagonistic point of view; his first thought when he saw her was not what he had to complain of, but how he could make her useful. He never praised her, and scarcely thanked her, but he endured her, and would have felt her loss if she had gone away; and that with a man of his temperament was a great point gained.

Now and then it even crossed Katharine's mind that she might be making herself too useful, raising up additional barriers between herself and the freedom which eventually she hoped to attain; but again her sober judgment of duty came to her aid, and taking the first step which presented itself to her as right, she left the second to God. Jane was better—able to see more of her children—to attend a little to the poor—to drive out, and occasionally see her friends; but there was nothing like real permanent strength to be seen. Katharine was very clear-sighted on this point; all the more so because she felt how much her own happiness might depend upon it. Charles was extremely good and patient: he never complained, or put forward his own wishes selfishly, but as weeks went on, Katharine could see that he was pained at their long separation, and anxious for an excuse to come to Rilworth, and unhappy if ever an obstacle was suggested. And when this was the case so early in their engagement, she could not but fear what the effect of the prolonged delay might be upon his spirits. Such a state of things naturally brought up

again the question of comparative duty to him and to Jane; but that was looking into the future. They could not be married yet, even if she were free, and doubtless before the year was expired which feeling for her mother's memory required should elapse, her duty would be made clear to her. In the meantime, separation and annoyance had been as it were accepted by them, and must be borne with resignation. For herself, she had much to lessen her trial. First, perhaps, that which it is always in human nature to feel, that the suffering was her voluntary choice, not brought upon her by the will of another; and next the constant, brightening influence of Jane's presence and companionship. For it was companionship, notwithstanding Katharine's watchfulness lest affection should lead either of them to a degree of intimacy which Colonel Forbes might disapprove.

Katharine read aloud well; she had been carefully taught at Miss Richardson's, and had always been in the habit of reading to her mother. Jane's eyes were weak, and on what she used to call her bad days, the effort of reading to herself was very fatiguing. It was a great pleasure to find that Katharine could go on reading for nearly two hours at a time, without showing any signs of weariness; and when the book was laid aside, there was a still greater pleasure in hearing her simple, frank, clever remarks; so totally unbiassed by the world, so unlike the trite observations which Jane had been accustomed to in general society. Katharine had cultivated her mind of late years as far as in her lay, because she was anxious to follow the advice of a person whom she respected like Mr. Reeves; now she found the benefit, as he had told her would be the case. She was the better fitted by it for the position in which the Providence of God had placed her. Such intercourse was like a new sense to Jane, and now and then she was induced to bring forward Katharine's doubts and questions to her husband, not saying whose they were (for that might have jarred upon him) but putting them before him as he liked to hear them, in an humble, submissive manner, which allowed him fully to feel his own superiority. A little conversation of this kind was very sweet to her after the perpetual contradiction to which she had been subjected. She wondered why she had so seldom before been able to discuss books with him. But there was a difference between bringing forward her own opinions or convictions, and those of another. Her own were more precious to her, more important, and to hear them contradicted or ridiculed seemed to widen the breach between them. Katharine's were sufficiently like her own to be interesting, but not sufficiently

so to make her unhappy, if they were not deemed worthy of attention.

And there was good for Katharine also in this intercourse. A great difference exists between minds trained in the active and the passive schools of life, by action or by endurance. Busy minds too often want softness, refinement, elevation; there is little poetry in them, or that which they possess is only latent, crushed beneath the load of present interests; and so too often they lack that spirituality which is poetry in its truest and highest sense. There is danger in this. We may work, even for God, so as to forget Him, and very good therefore it is for us if, when forbidden the leisure to pause ourselves, we are permitted to gaze, though but for awhile, upon those whose existence is spiritual rather than material, and who bring before us a faint image of the undying, yet ever-resting love of Heaven.

Jane's life was, even now, in Katharine's eyes, like that of an angel — as pure, as raised above all worldly hopes or fears. If at times she grieved bitterly over her husband's coldness, or thought anxiously of her children's future lot, her fears and sorrows were fast becoming absorbed in the daily, hourly contemplation of the far dearer love, to the enjoyment of which she was, in God's mercy, hastening. It was repose to sit by her, to hear her speak, to watch the bright, calm smile, which so often, even in the midst of suffering, lingered on her worn face. Even whilst exerting herself still at times beyond her strength in attending to the necessary duties of her station, there was no forgetfulness, no absorption in earthly cares. It might have seemed that an invisible hand was ever before her, pointing to the dial plate of Time, and warning her that she was about to hear the summons to Eternity.

Yes, it was very good for Katharine to live in such a presence. It was a lesson to be remembered through life, to elevate her mind in sorrow, and sober it in joy. And fully and thankfully she realised its blessings. Not all her love for Charles, her glad hopes for the future, her peaceful yet sorrowing regrets for the past, could make her insensible to the fact that the Providence of God was placing her where, for the good of her own soul, it was best that she should be. If she had in a degree sacrificed her own for another's happiness, the sacrifice was a hundredfold repaid. The quiet life in Jane's room — the sight of her childlike yet intense devotion, her unresisting submission, her wonderful unselfishness — was more powerful in its effect upon Katharine's mind than the most eloquent sermon or the most holy words of medita-

tion. Essentially practical herself, she required, in order to be influenced, the sight of practice in others. Mere poetry, enthusiasm, or abstraction, would have had no power over her. However beautiful in appearance, she would in a moment have discovered the element wanting to their reality. But there could be no doubt with Jane. Religion was in her every thought, word, and action. It could no more have been separated from her existence, than the air she breathed, and, when withheld from expressing itself outwardly, it worked inwardly, effacing, day by day, the remaining stains of human infirmity, and tracing upon her fair, calm features, the indescribable beauty of the world of purity in which her thoughts so fondly dwelt.

By living with Jane, Katharine learnt that there were heights in religion within her own reach, but which hitherto she had only imagined attainable in the entire seclusion of a solitary life.

And Colonel Forbes lived with Jane also. What effect had such an intercourse upon him?

He had no key to the language of her soul, and he did not understand her.

CHAPTER LXIII.

KATHARINE had been at Maplestead three months. She had during that period seen Charles once, for about two hours only, when he came to his aunt's for a day, and she had been able to meet him by appointment at the Rectory. He had talked of coming again in six weeks, and Katharine was beginning to expect him. She was working as usual in her own room, a little troubled in her mind at not having heard from him that morning as she had anticipated, and wondering whether silence meant that he was coming. The two children were with her, for her room was a favourite resort with them. They had a nursery governess, a Swiss, only lately arrived, and it was rejoicing to them to escape from a stranger to one whom they had so long known. "Mademoiselle reads so oddly," said Philip, "I don't a bit understand her, and she can't teach me Latin at all, and I want to learn Latin very much."—"To be a man," added Lucy. "Miss Ashton, Philip always wishes he was a man."—"He will have his wish one of these days," said Katharine, smiling, "if he should live long enough, but he must have patience."—"Mademoiselle has not patience," said Philip; "she got into a great passion this morning all about

nothing."—"No, not about nothing," said Lucy, whose love of truth was remarkable; "it was because you laughed at her, Philip."—"I could not help it," replied Philip; "nobody could. You know, Miss Ashton, she reads Sare for Sir."—"That is her foreign way of pronouncing," observed Katharine; "but do you ever read to her, Master Philip?"—"Sometimes; but she was reading a story to me, then. You know I read to mamma generally."—"Only it makes mamma's head ache," said Lucy. "It ached so much this morning, that we could not read at all," continued Philip; "and we didn't yesterday, nor the day before."—"Except the Bible," said Lucy; "you forget."—"No, I don't; but we didn't read the Bible, Mamma read it to us," replied Philip, hastily. Katharine became a little thoughtful. She knew enough of education to be aware that this irregular training was very prejudicial. "Well, you must go back to the schoolroom now," she said. "It is mamma's luncheon time, and I must go and see that she has it comfortably."—"And ask her if she will take me out in the carriage with her this afternoon," said Philip. "I don't like walking with mademoiselle, at all."—"We needn't walk; we may play in the garden if we like," said Lucy.—"Yes, but I like the carriage best; it goes along so fast."—"The pony would go faster," said Lucy.—"I don't care for the pony, because Mamma won't let me go without a leading rein."—"That is what I like," said Lucy, "it is so safe."—"But you are a girl," exclaimed Philip, contemptuously. "Boys never go with leading reins."—"Except when their mammas wish it," suggested Katharine. "But now, Master Philip, you really must run away, and I will remember to ask about the carriage." The children departed, and Katharine, after lingering for a few moments in thought, went to the morning room.

It was one of Jane's bad days, as Philip had said; she had a very bad head-ache, and she had no appetite. Katharine placed a little table by her side, and carved the wing of a partridge for her, and poured out a glass of wine, but she could not touch any thing. She seemed very exhausted, and talked of not going out in the afternoon. Katharine did not tease her to eat when she found how her appetite was gone, but rang to have the things taken away, and then made Jane lie down, and offered to read to her; but her head was aching too much, and Katharine, at her request, took her work instead, and sat down by her. She half hoped that Jane might sleep, but she did not seem inclined, and they began talking about the children.—"It vexes me so, sometimes," said Jane, "to have them so little with me. This morn-

ing I sent them away, and so I did yesterday, and the day before; I can't read to them at all scarcely, now, it tires me so." — "It must be worse reading to children than to grown-up people," said Katharine, "because they cannot be kept quiet." — "No, and that distracts one; but I can't bear hearing many people read the Bible, it is one of my fidgets; Colonel Forbes reads beautifully," she added. — "I can imagine that," replied Katharine; "he has such a good voice." — "And he reads with such reverence," said Jane, in a sorrowful tone, as her mind travelled back to those past years when one of her great pleasures had been pointing out to him her favourite passages in the Prophecies, and listening to him whilst he read them aloud, or spoke of them with an admiration of their beauty, which she had fondly believed to proceed from the heart, as well as the intellect. — "He has not much time for reading now," she added. — "Perhaps he does not know that you would like it," observed Katharine. — "Oh! yes, he does, he must know it," said Jane; "and yet," she continued with a smile, "I dare say I never said much about it; I was dreadfully shy in those days." — "I wish he would read to the children in the morning," observed Katharine; "it would be much better, ma'am, than your doing it." — "He has not time," said Jane; "and he does not understand children, he would be fretted by them; and I could not talk before him; not that I talk much now, I am too tired." — "I should have thought Colonel Forbes liked reading out," said Katharine; "most people enjoy doing what they do well." — "I think he would like it, if it came into his head; at least, it depends upon the kind of reading." — Katharine longed to say, why don't you ask him to read; but she was afraid it might appear a liberty. "What are you thinking of, Katharine?" said Jane, after a short silence. — Katharine smiled, and blushed a little: she had been thinking what she should feel if the time should ever come that she was afraid to ask Charles to read the Bible to her. — "If I were not a coward!" continued Jane, thoughtfully; "that has been my bane through life. Katharine, I am very glad you are not one." — "I could not say that I am not," said Katharine; "I think I am a great coward, in some things much more than you were, ma'am, when first I knew you." — "Ah! but I was free then," said Jane; and after a moment's thought, she added, "cowardice comes with love." — "But it cannot stay," said Katharine. "Perfect love casteth out fear." — "That is not human love," said Jane, earnestly; "there must be some fear, I think, where there is imperfection." — "And fear creates fear," said

Katharine. An expression of pain crossed Jane's face ; she was silent again for a few moments, then she said, "Katharine, if I were to begin my life over again, I would try above all things never to give way to cowardice ; it has done me much harm, and others also," she added in a lower tone. Katharine hesitated a little before she replied : "I suppose it is possible to overcome it whether at the beginning or the end of life." — "It is possible to be resigned to its effects," said Jane ; "but I do not think it is possible to overcome it, or at least I do not think it would be wise to attempt it, because it would be unnatural and jarring." — "And so things must remain as they are," observed Katharine, sadly but timidly : she had seldom before approached so near the subject of Jane's private feelings towards her husband. A faint smile passed over Jane's face as she turned to Katharine affectionately and said, "Don't fret for me, Katharine : it is good for me, — and," she added solemnly, "in God's mercy, I think it may be good for him : I have great trust." — Katharine could not echo the words. "His heart," continued Jane, speaking quickly, as if anxious to pour forth all that was working in her mind, now that the barrier which had kept it in was for a season broken down, "has never been touched by real sorrow. I think he will feel it when I am gone ; he will know then the love that he has lost with me." — Tears dimmed Katharine's eyes ; it was a mournful hope, after years of what ought to have been happiness in married life ; and again she thought of Charles and her own prospects. "It will come," continued Jane, her cheek tinged with the faint crimson of excitement ; "the change will come ; not yet, — not that I shall see it, but it will surely come ; and when he is restored to me again, it will be with the love of which I dreamt in childhood, and for which my heart has yearned through life. Once, Katharine, I prayed that it might be permitted to me now to see it and rejoice ; but the prayer has been denied, doubtless in great mercy. It must be good that I should bear the punishment of my own failings." — "Yours, dear Mrs. Forbes !" exclaimed Katharine, eagerly ; "oh ! who can ever have had a claim to happiness in married life, if not you ?" — "Ah ! Katharine, you do not know ; you have seen but the outside ; whether, if I had been different, he would not have been different also, who can say ? and besides, I did err in many ways. I had constitutional defects, and I yielded to them." — "You were very timid and reserved," said Katharine. — "And cold from timidity," continued Jane ; "I never helped him on ; he often told me so, and he was right, quite right." — "But," Ka-

tharine hesitated. — "Say what you think, dear Katharine," said Jane, "you cannot hurt me; I am past the power of being wounded," she added, trying to smile. — "It was not against you," replied Katharine; "it was an excuse. I was going to say, that in your place, I should have been quite as timid, and, in consequence, as cold." — "No, you would not, Katharine; or if you felt yourself inclined to give way, you would have struggled against the weakness. In my case there was no struggle: reserve was in my nature, and I yielded to it. Even before I learnt to fear, I was reserved." — "But you showed your feeling in action," said Katharine. — "In obedience," replied Jane; "but obedience is not necessarily love, and even if it were so, it is not sufficient. A man's nature requires that his affections should be brought into active exercise, not permitted to lie dormant. The spring is not quick and ever-flowing like a woman's; and if it is covered up, it will become dry." — "But, surely," said Katharine, "with a wife and children, a man's affection can never be said to be dormant." — "Not until his wife has spoilt him," said Jane, very gravely; and the words carried Katharine back to the unconscious prophecy which she herself had uttered on Jane's wedding day. — "People have said to me, laughingly," continued Jane, "that I spoilt my husband. They little knew the pang which the words brought. Yes, Katharine, I acknowledge humbly, without excuse, that I have spoilt him. Because I dreaded to see him fretted, and shrank from the slightest appearance of contradiction, I put out of his way every thing which might annoy him, however necessary it might have been for him to see it. I did not give him the opportunity of consulting my wishes, because I seldom or never expressed them. I made him think I could live without him, because I never told him in what my own inner life consisted, and so never put it into his mind to wish to share it. It was all wrong — all a mistake — I hope it was not sinful; but it was a great error, it was fear." — She paused — and her breath came quick and faint with the exertion she had made in speaking. There was a silence of some seconds — then Katharine said, "I can scarcely fancy Colonel Forbes a man to bear any different treatment." — "Because you see him as he is now," said Jane; "when for years he has never, in his private life, known what it was to be contradicted; but, Katharine, it was not so once. There was the germ of the same disposition, but it might have been very differently nurtured, and it would have brought forth different fruit. He did care for the things for which I cared in those first days; and if I had not

been so sensitively fastidious, if I had been able to bear a hasty tone, or an impatient look, he might have cared for them still; he might have been angry for an instant, but it would have passed off; and if then, instead of a chilling timidity, which I was conscious of, and which made me wretched, but which I seldom or never heartily strove to overcome, I could have shown him what I really felt, he would not only have forgotten, but even have loved me the more because I taught him how to bring out his own feelings. Men like that," she continued. "The more they feel themselves drawn off to the world by business or politics, the more they value every thing which shows them that their higher nature is still living within them. They have not the power to bring it out for themselves; at least after they have passed beyond youth; it is a woman's quicker impulse which must do that, and if this is wanting, it too often sinks, and is buried." — "Never to rise again?" asked Katharine, repenting the words as they escaped her; but she need not have feared. Jane looked at her quietly and fixedly, and said in a voice which did not falter, "Yes, Katharine, to rise, but at the call of God, in sorrow and in death."

CHAPTER LXIV.

KATHARINE recurred to that conversation often in her own mind. Jane was right, there had been an error in her life. Whether it were in human nature to have rectified it, Katharine was sometimes inclined to doubt. Cold and fretful as Colonel Forbes now was, she could scarcely imagine the possibility of any amount of warmth of manner, or any claim upon his sympathy, however judicious, rousing him from his selfishness. Yet there were symptoms which, although they perplexed her, made her believe that she did not thoroughly understand him; and that there might be feelings to be touched with which as yet she was unacquainted. He was always more cross than usual when Jane was particularly ill; there was a cause for this in the interruption to his own comfort; but then it also implied that his comfort in some degree depended upon her. He was never satisfied unless she approved every thing he did. This again was the result of his impatience of contradiction, but it was also a proof that he had a respect for her opinion. He was always urging her to go into society, or to

receive company. This was done very selfishly, but it showed that he could not rest satisfied unless she shared his interests. He was not indifferent to his wife; he might complain, and fret, and tease her; he did so perpetually; but he evidently could not live without her. Katharine did not comprehend this till after she had been some time at Maplestead, and not thoroughly then until after her conversation with Jane. The idea that there had been an error in what might be called Colonel Forbes' training threw a new light upon his character. If he had in any degree been made selfish, perhaps the fault might be unmade. A very difficult task it would be, with all his natural inclinations working against the attempt; but still with watchfulness and prudence, and the aid of Him without whom all such efforts are vain, not to be set aside as hopeless.

Katharine called little Philip to her one morning, about a week after she had talked to Jane, and inquired whether he had been to his mamma for his Scripture reading. Philip's answer was, as she had expected, in the negative; "Mamma was not up, and they were to read in the afternoon."—"Mamma ought to go out for a drive in the afternoon;" said Katharine; "and when she comes in she will be so tired. I wish she would let me come and read for her."—"I shouldn't like that," said Philip, bluntly, "I don't like any one to read to me but mamma."—"Or papa," said Katharine, "he reads so beautifully."—"Did you ever hear him?" asked Philip. "Sometimes, a little, but mamma says he does, and she must know."—"He never reads the Bible," said Philip.—"Oh! yes, I dare say he does often to himself, but it would be very nice to hear him read it aloud, wouldn't it?"—"I don't know," replied the boy, "I would rather hear mamma."—"But then if it tries poor mamma, you would rather hear papa than any one else?"—"I will ask Lucy," said Philip, unable to decide the point without reference to his constant companion and elder sister. They came back together. "Will papa read to us?" asked Lucy, who had gained only a very vague notion of the conversation from Philip's report. "I don't know whether he will," replied Katharine, "but I think it would be very nice to hear him if he had time, because mamma says he reads more beautifully almost than any one, especially in the Bible."—"Papa does a great many things better than other people," said Philip, who had already imbibed the feeling of importance from his father's manner. Katharine did not cordially respond to the remark, but observed again that it would be very pleasant to have papa to read to them every morning. "I think I shall go and ask him," said Philip, considering. "I don't

like to go to the study," said Lucy, "papa always has so many letters to write, and says 'run away,' and then I am frightened."—"That is just like a girl," said Philip, "I shouldn't be frightened if he said 'run away' to me!"—"You would though," replied Lucy; "you sent me the other day when you wanted the sugar plums from Rilworth."—"I don't like asking things for myself," said Philip, "but I don't mind at all for other people."—"Perhaps papa would attend more if you went both together," said Katharine.—"But do you really mean us to go," asked Lucy. Katharine paused a moment, it was a perplexing question. "If there was no one with him," she said, "I thing you might ask him; at least you might say you would like it if he was not busy. Mamma would be sure to like it, because he reads so beautifully." Philip ran off, followed by Lucy, and rushing into the study with one idea prominent in his mind, exclaimed, "Papa, Miss Ashton says you read so beautifully, won't you come and read to us?" Colonel Forbes laid down his pen. "What? my boy, what?"—"Miss Ashton says it would be very nice if you were to read to us instead of mamma."—"What does the child mean? Miss Ashton! impertinence!"—"She says you read better than any one," said Lucy, humbly; "Philip and I wish you would let us hear you."—"I don't understand; run away, children. Lucy, tell Miss Ashton to come to me," and Colonel Forbes placed himself in a magisterial attitude. Katharine obeyed the summons, not quite with a quiet mind. She was afraid of the result of her experiment. She stood by the table, looking Colonel Forbes full in the face, though her eyes would much more naturally have turned to the ground. "Miss Ashton, my children have come to me with a very strange message; one I am not at all accustomed to. I wish to have no interference with the children, or with their pursuits! I wish you to understand that your office is confined to personal attendance upon Mrs. Forbes."—"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Katharine, with an unmoved face; "I hope there has been some mistake. I had no intention of taking a liberty."—"I trust not. There is nothing to which I am more alive, or which I should more severely reprimand. May I ask what induced you to send my children to me with such a message?"—"Perhaps you would be good enough to tell me what they said, sir," replied Katharine. Colonel Forbes repeated Philip's words, and a smile crossed Katharine's face as she heard them, though she felt herself in a most awkward position. "Master Philip did not quite understand me, sir," she said, "I was saying to him what Mrs. Forbes was saying to me the other day. I hope you will not think it impertinent in me to re-

peat it.”—“No, no! say on, let me hear.”—“Mrs. Forbes was observing, sir, how few people she could bear to hear read the Bible, and then she said, that almost the only person she could bear was yourself; and so when Master Philip told me his mamma was not well enough to read to him this morning, I said how nice it would be to hear you read instead, and that put it into his head and Miss Lucy’s to ask, and I said I thought they might if there were no one with you.” Colonel Forbes listened with a frowning brow, which relaxed a little unconsciously, as Katharine reached the end of her explanation. “Very much like what my little boy said, Miss Ashton. I will thank you not to let me be interrupted again on such foolish errands.”—“I am very sorry, sir, I will take care for the future,” and Katharine curtsied and retired. Colonel Forbes resumed his pen for a few moments, then laid it down again, and thought. His work, whatever it might be, seemed unsatisfactory, and after another attempt at completing it, he thrust it aside, and went up stairs to his wife’s room. “Jane, may I come in?” and he entered, scarcely waiting for an answer. Katharine was there, but she went away directly. “You are not good for much to-day?” he said, in the cross tone in which he so frequently addressed her when she was later than usual. “Only a little tired,” replied Jane, cheerfully. “I mean to get up directly.”—“You ought not to have the children with you as you do,” he said; “it is very provoking that you should so entirely disregard Dr. Lowe’s advice.”—“The children have not been with me at all this morning,” replied Jane. “I was obliged to send them away, and put off their reading till the afternoon.”—“And then you won’t be fit to hear them,” he replied. “It would be much better to have all that sort of thing over in the morning.”—“Yes, if possible, but then if one can’t?”—“There ought not to be any can’t in a case of health. I would come and read to them myself rather than have all their lessons put out in that way.”—“Would you, indeed? Oh! Philip, it would be so very pleasant!” Jane laid her little white hands on his, as it rested on the cover-lid, and added, with a smile of inexpressible sweetness, “it would remind me of the old times.”—“When I had nothing else to do but to read,” he said, shortly. “But what is it you read to these children?”—“The second morning lesson generally, at least that is what I have been reading lately. Do you really mean you will read?” she added, looking at him wistfully. “Why, yes, I should not have said so if I had not intended it; only they must be quiet. I shall ring for them.”—“Send the children here, Miss Ashton.”—“I should like the children to come, Katharine,” were the

words simultaneously spoken ; and in a few minutes, Philip and Lucy were seated by the bedside, listening with reverent faces, as Colonel Forbes read, certainly with the most perfect tone and expression, the portion of Scripture appointed for the day. "It is better to hear papa read a great deal than old Mr. Norton," was Lucy's comment, when he had ended.—"I think papa ought to have been a clergyman," said Philip.—"Nonsense, child ;" but Colonel Forbes turned over the leaves of the Bible, and looking for a particular passage in the Prophecy of Isaiah, pointed it out to his wife, and asked if she remembered their reading it together in the beech tree avenue, on a summer afternoon, before they were married ?—Jane remembered it well, and said timidly, "I suppose you could not read it to me again now ?"—"We have not had any questions asked us," said Philip.—"Never mind the questions now, take your chairs away, children," said Colonel Forbes, quickly. He drew his own arm-chair nearer to the bed. "Go now, darlings, and you shall answer the questions in the afternoon," said Jane ; and the children jumped up on the bed to kiss her, and were dismissed with a hasty : "Make haste, don't be troublesome, my dears," by their father, and then he went on reading. Longer he read than was desirable for Jane or at all convenient, for it delayed her dressing till she was obliged to interfere with Katharine's dinner ; but still it was great enjoyment to Jane, and very satisfactory to him. He had given his wife pleasure, instead of her giving it to him. The sensation was very pleasant, and it had all the charm of novelty. He gave Jane really an affectionate kiss, when he left her, and went back to his work, pleased rather than not at finding that he had lost an hour. He fancied he had been self-denying. That was a mistake ; it was selfishness still, but in a better form than what he had lately indulged. It was reverting to what he had been when first he married ; when he consulted Jane's wishes because he was in love with her, and so in pleasing her was pleasing himself. His vanity had been flattered ;—how indignant he would have been if he had heard himself accused of vanity, though pride he would have acknowledged to any extent !—that put him into good humour, and the effects were seen throughout the day. He had his luncheon with Jane, instead of by himself, and actually consented, at her request, to take Philip for a ride with him, without the leading rein. Jane longed that he should go for a drive with her, but that would have interfered with Philip's pleasure ; so she agreed to drive in the same direction in which they were going, though it made her nervous to see her boy on horseback, in order that Philip might

show her what a good horseman he was becoming, and Colonel Forbes might have some one to whom he might say what a fine manly little fellow Philip was.

CHAPTER LXV.

A NEW state of things was gradually growing up at Maplestead. Katharine thought she saw it, then feared she was mistaken, then hoped again, then doubted whether it could possibly last—it seemed to have so little root. Colonel Forbes read to his wife every morning. Jane expressed her enjoyment warmly, a great deal more warmly than she would have done some years, or even months before. That little mutual interest brought another, and another; neither of them exactly knew how or why; perhaps no one in the house could have told except Katharine. Jane wanted to work a sofa-cushion for Mrs. Reeves, and Katharine managed to bring the patterns into the room just when she knew Colonel Forbes was likely to be there, so that he might give his opinion, which she knew he would do because he piqued himself so much upon his taste. Jane and he agreed in liking the same; and then Katharine ventured to ask whether, as he would be in Rilworth in the course of the afternoon, he would bring back the lambs-wool; and the proposal being made at a happy moment, he consented. The work began thus under his sanction, as it were, so of course he took an interest in it, and liked to see how it went on, and this brought him more frequently to Jane's room. He generally found Katharine reading to her, and having made a discovery as to his own talent for reading aloud, he was not indisposed to exhibit it, and would now and then take the book from Katharine's hand and go on himself. Jane and Katharine did not always read political pamphlets when they were alone, and Colonel Forbes' thoughts therefore were a little diverted out of the well-worn channel which he had dug for himself. He was a man of considerable natural taste and refinement, and when he and Jane began to talk about books, as it was natural they should after reading together, the conversation generally ended with a reference to other books. Then came the necessity of having them, and writing for them; and when there was to be a parcel from London, Jane, at Katharine's instigation, would venture to express some wishes of her own, to ask for something which she

had often wanted to have, but which, perhaps, she had fancied it would be a little troublesome to procure. Her expressed wishes suggested to Colonel Forbes the possibility of forestalling those which were unexpressed, and thus there sprang up by degrees some of those little delicate attentions, and signs of thoughtfulness, which are the green-house plants of the domestic garden.

And all this was, humanly speaking, Katharine's doing; the result of incessant watchfulness, and the tact of her unselfish mind. Yet she kept herself always in the background, not from any direct intention, but merely from that sense of fitness and propriety which had distinguished her through life, and so she harmonised with whatever might be going on, and completely forgetting herself, never, for a moment, sought to obtrude in order to bring herself into notice. Colonel Forbes began to remark this at last, and when he found that Katharine might be spoken to safely, he relaxed a little in his manner, and now and then made an observation about her to Jane which did more to produce unity of feeling between them than even personal kindness could have done. Katharine was becoming dearer to Jane every day, and to find that her husband could, even in a remote degree, appreciate what she herself felt so deeply, was an indescribable comfort.

"Miss Ashton here, Mrs. Brown?" inquired Crewe, looking into the housekeeper's room about post time, one morning in the spring succeeding Katharine's first arrival at Maplestead.—"Do you want me, Mr. Crewe?" asked Katharine, appearing from behind the screen which the housekeeper had put up to save herself from rheumatism.—"Only a letter for you," said Crewe, scanning the address with a look of impertinent curiosity; "the old hand, so I dare say it will be welcome."—A rush of colour covered Katharine's cheek, partly from confusion, but more perhaps from extreme indignation. This was not the first time that Crewe had ventured to observe upon the frequent letters which came to her in the same handwriting.—"I suppose it is because you have so few letters yourself, that you find time to remark upon other people's, Mr. Crewe," said the housekeeper, coming, as she hoped, to Katharine's assistance.—"I take the liberty of keeping my correspondence to myself," retorted Crewe.—"And I should think Miss Ashton would take care to do the same for the future," said the housekeeper; "I thought letters were always private property."—"A cat may look at a king," said Crewe, carelessly. "I never heard yet that the outside of a letter was

not property for any one that chose."—Katharine was for a moment tempted to reply, but she never trusted herself to have any thing like an altercation with Crewe, and opening her letter, she began to read it.—"There is enough of it, at least," said Crewe, glancing at the closely written sheet. Katharine folded up her letter, replaced it in the envelope, and saying to the housekeeper that she hoped to return almost immediately, left the room. Crewe burst into a fit of laughter, which still rung in Katharine's ears when she reached her own apartment. This was the hardest trial of all. Coldness she felt she could bear, and misapprehension, and loneliness, but vulgar insult seemed a trial beyond her strength—till the thoughts which now habitually came to her mind in every trial, brought the remembrance that even this suffering had in a far greater degree been endured for her. She could read her letter calmly then, forgetting Crewe, and not even troubling herself as to the consequences of his curiosity. Where there was nothing of which to be ashamed, there could be no fear of any discovery. Charles hoped to be at Rilworth the next day but one. That was the first sentence of the letter, and it made Katharine's heart beat with a feeling of such delight that she scarcely thought of reading further. He had arranged every thing so as if possible to save her any inconvenience. He hoped, he said, she would go to his aunts' for luncheon, for he knew they would like it, but he could not say whether he should be there himself. If, however, she could contrive to have business with Mrs. Reeves, he would follow her there, and they might, he trusted, have the little inner study to themselves, as had several times been managed before, only she must write to Mrs. Reeves and settle it. The concluding sentence of the letter made Katharine smile, for it contained a warning which he was much more likely to need than she was.—"Pray remember that, if we should meet at my aunts', we must be extremely polite to each other. Aunt Priscilla has a most keen eye."—Katharine hoped that she should not meet him there, notwithstanding her longing to see him. She did not feel she could quite depend upon his discretion; and certainly, unless they wished all Rilworth to know of their engagement, it would not be wise to trust the two old aunts with it. That fear, however, was to be left, like many others, not to reason, but to circumstances. The principal thing, then, for Katharine to consider, was how to carry out the plan he proposed. Jane was very dependent upon her, yet Katharine knew she would not for an instant object, if leave were asked to go into Rilworth for the day. Colonel Forbes was the awful person—he meddled

more now with little family arrangements than he had done before, and in spite of the amendment in some ways, "no" still came more easily to his lips than "yes." Probably he might have found some special employment to occupy her at home, exactly at the time she wished to be away, but that, happily, some new curtains were to be chosen for the morning room, and Katharine was supposed to be a better judge of the proper material than any one else; and thus, when Jane asked whether he happened to be going into Rilworth, and could allow Katharine the back seat of the carriage, a reason was, at the same time assigned for the request, which even he could not find fault with.

"Going out so early, Miss Ashton?" said Crewe, when he saw her in the hall with her bonnet and shawl on, waiting for the carriage. "I am going into Rilworth, Mr. Crewe," replied Katharine, quickly but good humouredly. "Then I shall have the honour of accompanying you," said Crewe. Katharine did not reply, though perhaps her features betrayed a shade of the great annoyance which she really felt. "You don't waste words, Miss Ashton," said Crewe: "most persons who give themselves out for being civil would have had the grace to say they were glad, whether they felt it or not."—"I am glad you should go if you wish to go, Mr. Crewe," said Katharine; "but it is not a matter of much consequence to me."—"It's best, doubtless, to go about the world by oneself when one has secrets," said Crewe; "there's less chance of being found out." Katharine went to the hall door to look for the carriage. "It's not coming yet," said Crewe, planting himself in her way; "and there's no use in trying to get away, for you'll have me close beside you the whole way, so you may as well take matters quietly at once."—"Perhaps you would have the goodness to let me pass, Mr. Crewe," said Katharine, as he stood in the doorway when she was about to re-enter the hall; "I think my mistress wants me."—"Oh! so you're not too proud to have a mistress," observed Crewe; "I suppose that's since you've made up your mind to have a master." Katharine became very pale, though she tried not to appear to understand him, for she thought he had discovered her secret; but it was only as yet his suspicion, and he went on, not knowing how really vulnerable she was, but from the mere love of tormenting her. "And you are going into Rilworth on important business, Miss Ashton? I suppose you look down upon me too much to condescend to tell me what it is."—"I have several commissions," replied Katharine, endeavouring to speak gently and unconcernedly; "one is to choose some new curtains for Mrs. Forbes'

morning room.”—“Oh! yes, I forgot; I quite forgot,” said Crewe, sneeringly; “Miss Ashton is such a very important personage at Maplestead, it is quite impossible even to choose a curtain without her permission. Would it be taking a great liberty to ask what the pattern is to be?”—“It is at the bottom of my bag,” said Katharine; “I am afraid I cannot take it out,” and again she attempted to pass him, for he had been standing directly in her way all this time. “Not quite so fast,” exclaimed Crewe; “you ladies must spare a little of your curiosity to the gentlemen.” He put his hand out as if he would have taken the bag from her. Katharine was very angry then, and holding the bag firmly in her hand, she said, “Mr. Crewe, if you do not understand your proper place, I shall be under the necessity of applying to your master.” She turned round, and Colonel Forbes stood behind her. Crewe slunk back abashed. Katharine did not notice him farther, but addressing Colonel Forbes, said, “Perhaps, sir, you will have the goodness to tell Mr. Crewe that the members of your household are to be treated with respect by him, as they are by yourself. I am sure it is what you wish.” There was a spark of chivalrous feeling in Colonel Forbes’ breast, easily excited when his selfishness did not come in the way, and Katharine’s appeal to his protection roused it. “Quite right, Miss Ashton, I hope you will always keep your right position, and allow no liberties. Let me hear no more of this, sir,” he added, speaking haughtily and angrily to Crewe; “but remember that the next time will be the last.” Crewe muttered something about a mistake, and only intending a joke, and disappeared into a side passage, whilst Katharine, as the carriage drove up, mounted to the back seat. She was rejoicing in the hope of having escaped from her troublesome companion, but no such fortunate circumstance was destined for her. Crewe kept out of sight till Colonel Forbes had seated himself, and then appeared from a side door, and with a sullen glance of triumph at Katharine, placed himself by her side.

That was the first stern rebuke which Crewe had received from his master. It rankled in his breast, and he vowed revenge. Not a word was spoken on either side during the drive, and when the carriage stopped at the Bear, Crewe was particularly attentive to Katharine, and helped her down, and even held the apple of discord—the bag—for her. He took care, however, to make her name every place to which she was going, and maliciously insinuated to Colonel Forbes in an under voice, that Miss Ashton was not always very punctual, so it might be well to make her be

at the Bear by three instead of half-past, else she might keep him waiting. Colonel Forbes never had had any experience of Katharine's want of punctuality, but through life he had gone upon the principle that it was better to make others wait for him than for him to wait for others; so he very naturally took the hint, and Katharine was curtailed of half an hour of her afternoon's holiday.

It was a keener disappointment than Crewe was aware of, though not keener than he would willingly have inflicted. Katharine did not recover it till she had completed her business, and found herself on her way to the Miss Ronaldsons'; then the feeling of freedom, and the hope of meeting Charles, made her put every disagreeable thought aside.

"Come in, my dear, come in, here's our nephew Charlie, and he'll be glad to see you," was Miss Priscilla's welcome; and in its heartiness and ignorance it nearly overthrew Katharine's self-command, and she drew back with an unaccountable fit of shyness and amusement. "Don't be nervous, my dear; he's only an old friend, you know. Not but what I can quite understand,—I was shy myself when I was young. But he will like to hear all the news; he is quite as much interested about Rilworth people as ever." Miss Priscilla gave Katharine a gentle push, which assisted her resolution, and she went on. The two hasty strides which Charles took to meet her, and the sudden pause, were observed by Miss Ronaldson, from her great arm-chair, and attributed to their right cause, and commented upon in her own mind with the usual "Ah! poor fellow! if she had but said yes."—"You did not expect to meet our nephew here, did you, my dear?" said Miss Priscilla.—"I heard he would be in Rilworth," replied Katharine, honestly, "but I did not know that he would be here now." A smile passed over Charles Ronaldson's face, but happily it was not observed by Miss Priscilla, whilst Miss Ronaldson was engaged in begging Katharine to sit down and take off her bonnet, and tell her all the news. "And so you are getting on pretty well at Maplestead, my dear, are you? and you don't find it very hard work?" Charles turned quickly from his aunt Priscilla, who was deep in the history of a proposed marriage which had just been broken off, in order to listen to the answer. Miss Priscilla drew herself up with a look of annoyance. "Well, Charlie, I must say there's little use in troubling oneself to tell you things, if you won't take the trouble to hear. Yet I should have thought you might have gained some good from other people's experience. You may be engaged yourself some of these

days, and then you'll feel there may be 'many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.'—"I feel that already every day, Aunt Priscilla," said Charles, gravely.—"But there's no harm in hearing it again, Charlie. It's a thing young people are very likely to forget; and then they pin their hope upon something which never comes to pass, and so they are miserable."—"But Charlie was never given much to hoping," said Miss Ronaldson. "Do you think he was, Katharine? You have known him from a boy."—"I should say he was more given to patience than hope," said Katharine, demurely.—"That is because you don't know me," replied Charles, quickly. "My patience is much sooner exhausted than you may think for; it is nearly gone now." He said this with marked emphasis, and Katharine cast at him an imploring glance, which unfortunately was noticed by Miss Priscilla, who had been watching something that was going on in the street, but happened to turn round just at the moment. "Ah! it's very well to look at him," she said, rather angrily; "but if he won't listen to his aunt, who nursed him when he was a baby, it's not to be supposed that looks from any body else will do any good, or if they do they ought not. You were always an impatient baby, Charles, crying directly you hadn't every thing you wanted; and I declare it seems to me that you are not much better now you are a man. If you would only have had patience just now, I would have told you something worth listening to."—"We will hear it after dinner, Aunt Priscilla," said Charles, laughing; "but Miss Ashton, I am sure, must be hungry, after her drive. Let me put a seat for you," he added, addressing Katharine with an air of stiff politeness, which almost upset her gravity, whilst it caused Miss Ronaldson to murmur to herself: "Ah! so attentive as he always was! I do wonder she couldn't like him." The dinner came most opportunely to engage every one's attention. Charles carved and talked, and made himself very agreeable, but he kept Katharine in a continual fright, from the impulse which always led him to listen to what she was saying, though he constantly checked himself, and tried to be doubly attentive to his aunts afterwards. It was a very doubtful kind of pleasure, and she was sure he felt it so, for every now and then her ear caught a suppressed sigh; and this made her uncomfortable and thoughtful. It certainly did seem hard upon him, after the many years of hopeless hope which he had passed, to be thus checked, and forced into constraint, at the very time when he might fairly have anticipated being at liberty to express all he felt. Such a state of things could scarcely go on; it was requiring too much of him; and it was worse now, as

the time drew near when, but for her engagement at Maplestead, he might fairly have claimed the fulfilment of her promise to be his wife. These thoughts made Katharine very silent at last, and then Charles noticed it, and looked anxiously at her, and became silent also, and Miss Priscilla wondered what had become of his cheerfulness all at once. "When you have a wife, Charlie, you won't be allowed to have these moods," she said, sharply; for she was always sharp when she alluded, in Katharine's presence, to the possibility of his marriage. "Wives don't let their husbands change with every change of the wind, do they, Katharine?"—"Miss Ashton is not a wife," said Charles, "so she cannot be expected to know."—"But she may be one of these days, my dear Charlie," said Miss Ronaldson: "there is nothing more likely, considering the quantity of fine company she must see at Maplestead." Katharine thought of Crewe, and smiled. "However that may be," said Miss Priscilla, "I'm quite sure that Katharine Ashton is not the person to bear dull faces and sighs; and what has come to you, Charles, all of a sudden, I can't for the life of me think. It is just like the wind going down."—"And the lull after it," said Charles, playfully, "which every one enjoys so much."—"Which no one enjoys, you mean," retorted Miss Priscilla; "at least I can answer for myself. Come, now, tell us more what you were saying about the Rilworth agency."—"It is a secret," said Charles, scarcely able to control the smile which curled his lips. "Oh! but Deborah is gone away," said Miss Ronaldson, "and Katharine Ashton is quite one of ourselves, she will never tell any thing; she has been too well brought up not to know how to keep a secret." An assertion to which Katharine, when appealed to herself, replied, with a most composed countenance, "that she could assure Mr. Ronaldson that she had had great experience in the art of keeping secrets, and thought that she could even rival himself." Charles still hesitated, apparently from real unwillingness to enter upon the topic, and Katharine sat in most painful suspense, increased tenfold when the servant re-entered, and put an end to all hope of hearing what was so important to her. A desultory conversation followed, principally about the news from Australia, which as far as it went had been tolerably satisfactory. They had heard once on the voyage. John wrote in good spirits, full of hope as usual. Selina only sent her love, for she was too ill to write. The children were becoming accustomed to the sea, and seemed to be very happy, notwithstanding the confinement; but they sent a particular love to Aunt Katharine. All this was very well; and since

then a few lines had been received, written immediately on their landing, but not entering into any details of John's prospects. Katharine told all this, and talked about it, and was supposed by Miss Ronaldson to have her whole heart in the subject. But she did not quite deceive Miss Priscilla, who interrupted her, as from time to time she paused, not to take breath, but to recover the thread of the discourse, which in her abstraction she had lost, with, "Well! my dear, well! and what next? Charlie can't help you, can he? You look at him as if he could." Charlie could have helped her very well, for he had seen all the letters, and once or twice he was upon the point of correcting some little misstatement, unintentionally made, till a glance from Katharine put him on his guard.

Nothing could be more disagreeable and more contrary to the habits and feelings of both; and most rejoiced was Katharine when dinner was over, and she could adduce business with Mr. Reeves as an excuse for departure. Miss Ronaldson regretted that they had yet a great deal to say, and that Charlie had not told her half he had to tell about the North, and what a comfortable house he had, and such a nice garden, and a good bit of land; and how he had lately bought a little property near it; and Miss Priscilla declared that they had not had time even to ask after Mrs. Forbes; but Katharine was not to be prevailed upon to stay, and she departed with a kiss from the Miss Ronaldsons, and what looked like a civil shake of the hand from Charles.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"THIS is not to be endured, Katharine," exclaimed Charles, when he found himself alone with Katharine in the little inner study at Mr. Reeves' house, where they were free from all chance of interruption. "I don't think it is," was Katharine's calm reply. He brightened up instantly. "You don't think so; then you will give me some hope.—Oh! Katharine, if you knew, if you could but for a moment imagine, how infinitely dear it would be! But you cannot, you have not loved for eight years as I have."—"We will not compare notes upon that point," said Katharine, with a slight blush. "Perhaps I might be able to sympathise more than you would think proper; but Charles, dearest, we must not be selfish, even for our own sakes. I am sure there is no

evil so irremediable.”—“I will not be selfish if I can help it,” he replied, eagerly; “but is it possible not to be? To have all one most longs for upon earth put just within one’s grasp, and then withheld.”—“By duty,” said Katharine: “is not that the case with every thing through life?”—“But why should it be withheld?” he continued; “or for how long? Is my happiness for ever to be made subservient to that of another?” Katharine looked pained, and he instantly checked himself, and added, “Forgive me; I feel I am very wrong, but I have suffered so much—so very much—it has made me, I am afraid, impatient.” Katharine laid her hand fondly upon his shoulder, and said, “I will not let you be impatient with me. I do not think this state of things can last: perhaps,” and she smiled, “I do not think it ought to last; but it must be put an end to gradually.”—“But this secrecy, this horrible secrecy,” he exclaimed, vehemently; “not to be able to think, or look, or move naturally!”—“That certainly must be stopped,” she said; “I feel myself that I cannot bear it. I doubt even if it would be right to continue it.”—“Right or not right, it could not be possible,” he continued, “if I come to Rilworth.”—“To Rilworth! really, to take the agency do you mean?” Katharine’s face became bright with happiness as she added, “that would indeed make a difference.”—“The agency has been offered me at last,” he replied: “I may remove hither in three months. Katharine, must my new home lack its chiefest treasure?” Katharine pressed her lips to his forehead, and in a low voice answered: “Not if it please God to open the way.” His manner changed directly: he looked at her with fond reverence, and said, “My better angel, now as ever. Yes, we must wait for that.”—“And wait cheerfully and unrepiningly, dearest; but I do hope our path will be more easy than we dared hope. If you are settled here or in this neighbourhood, it would not be going away from Maplestead in the same way as I had feared.”—“And you will tell Mrs. Forbes at once?” he said, eagerly. “Not at once; I would watch for a good time. She is so little able to bear any thing like a shock. Will not that satisfy you?” she added, looking anxiously at his grave face. “It ought to satisfy me, I know,” he said; “but, Katharine, I am not like you, I have no second interest to share my heart. Nay, do not interrupt me,” seeing she was about to speak; “God forbid that I should be jealous; yet it must cross my mind occasionally,—that your thoughts are not all given to me.”—“All that you would wish are. Indeed, indeed, they are, Charles,” exclaimed Katharine, hastily.—“I know it—I believe it. It would be death to

me not to believe it;—but, Katharine, my life is a continued straining after future happiness, and it makes me wretched.”—“It could not have been otherwise, dearest Charles,” said Katharine, “even if I had never gone to Maplestead.”—“Yes, but there would have been no secresy then; I might have seen you as often as I chose, and without any fear of unpleasant observation.”—“The secresy shall not last,” said Katharine, firmly; “I will promise you that. But you must let me take my own time. It would be but a miserable thought for us both that; in order to save ourselves a short pain, we had been the cause of a lasting evil. Oh! Charles, do not let us begin life together with a feeling of self-reproach!”—He was silent for some minutes, and then, heaving a deep sigh, he said: “Katharine, I am not worthy of you; I could never be as unselfish as you are.”—“You would feel as I feel, if you were in my place,” said Katharine. “You know little or nothing of Mrs. Forbes, except by my report. If you were with her daily, watching and nursing her; if you could tell what it is to see her and talk with her, how it raises one’s mind, and what a different feeling it gives one about life, and its pleasures, and business, you would understand what it is to think of giving her pain. For her sake I am a coward, Charles, even where you are concerned; but you will forgive me. Our first thought was that our own love should not be the means of diminishing our love for others.”—“I must forgive you whatever you wish,” he replied. “You know too well how impossible it is for me ever to be angry with you:—but, Katharine, my patience will not bear again such an ordeal as I have gone through to-day.” Katharine smiled, and said: “You behaved very badly. If Miss Priscilla were not your aunt, the report of our engagement would have spread half over the town by this time. I am sure she suspected something. But indeed, Charles, for my own sake, I am anxious to have every thing known as soon as possible. No one can tell the pain that any thing approaching to deceit gives me. It was one of Miss Richardson’s strongest lessons; so it has grown up with me from childhood.”—“Yet you could deceive me,” he replied, in a tone of playful reproach, “and for eight years too.”—“Because I deceived myself, or tried to do so,” said Katharine, laughing; “and we must not go back to those old grievances: I want to hear about the future now.”

A long conversation as to the Rilworth agency, and the plans which Charles had for removing from his home in the North, followed. There had often been the report before that the change would be made; but it had never come from good authority; now

there could be little doubt, for Charles had himself received a letter upon the subject from the Duke of Lowther. His mother, he said, was rejoicing in the thought of returning to her own neighbourhood, and most especially happy in the hope that it would make some difference in Katharine's determination. Three months only remained of the year which Katharine had always felt ought to elapse between her mother's death and her marriage. In that time she hoped to prepare Mrs. Forbes' mind for the idea of parting with her, and soften what might probably be her regret by the promise of settling near her. Charles, after all his uncertainty, received this fixed plan with unmitigated delight; but Katharine's feelings were less buoyant. She had begun her work at Maplestead; and even if called to leave it on the morrow, she would at least have the satisfaction of feeling that Jane had been made permanently happier by her influence; but much remained to be done, and, even if it were not so, there was something in looking forward three months to the probability of Jane's life, which made Katharine tremble. Death might be nearer even to herself, but with Jane it seemed ever actually present.

CHAPTER LXVII.

KATHARINE was at the Bear punctually by half-past three; so also was Crewe. Colonel Forbes had not arrived. Crewe lingered in the inn-yard, looking at carriages and criticising horses, and showing off airs to the stable-boys and ostlers. He did not take any notice of Katharine, and, finding it awkward to be standing about amongst the mixed set of men who crowded the doorway, waiting for the arrival of an omnibus from the railway, she thought it would be better to walk a little way down the street, still taking care not to be far enough away to give any cause for complaint. She had just parted from Charles, and tried not to think it possible that she should see him again; yet her restless eye wandered everywhere, not mistaking any one else for him, — that would have been impossible, — but with an undefined hope that he would appear suddenly round some corner, and that she should see him even if he did not come near enough to speak to him. She did not think he would be seen very near the Bear, for they had a half scolding and wholly affectionate quarrel ere they parted, because Katharine would not allow him to walk with

her there ; and he had threatened that, since she would not permit him to show her any attention in public, he should think it his duty to cut her if he saw her in the street. Ten minutes had gone by, and the omnibus had arrived and deposited its passengers, and the loiterers around the inn door had dispersed, and then Katharine thought it would be wise to return. Crewe met her at the entrance, and in his usual free way addressed her ; " So Miss Ashton, come at last ! I hope you have had enough of parading the streets." — " Is Colonel Forbes ready, Mr. Crewe ? " asked Katharine, not choosing to notice his manner. — " He might have been ready half an hour ago," said Crewe ; " but it would have been no thanks to you." — " I should like to inquire if all the parcels are put into the carriage," said Katharine, and she moved on. Crewe placed himself by her side. " I should just like to hear what you have been doing with yourself all the morning," he said. His tone was so insolent that Katharine looked round for some one to whom she could appeal, and just at that moment Charles Ronaldson crossed the entrance. Katharine's impulse was irresistible. She rushed back down the passage, followed by Crewe, and, touching Charles on the arm, exclaimed, " Stay with me, please, Mr. Ronaldson, stay." He turned round, frightened at her vehemence. Crewe stood still, looking at them with an air of cool impertinence. " Come this way with me, Katharine," said Charles ; " this is not a place for you to wait in." He drew her aside into a little waiting room, and Crewe, bursting into a loud laugh, withdrew into the yard.

The carriage was ready. The parcels were examined and found to be right. Colonel Forbes was seated delivering some messages to Crewe, the most obsequious, smooth-mannered of his race. " Where is Miss Ashton ? " asked Colonel Forbes, impatiently. — " Not ready, sir, I believe," was the reply ; " she was here just now talking to the Duke's agent, Mr. Ronaldson, and they went indoors together." Crewe knew his master well. This was precisely the very thing most likely to irritate him. The Rilworth household were expected always to behave so discreetly as never to excite even a passing observation. " Tell her I am waiting," said Colonel Forbes, in a dry haughty tone ; and in a moment Crewe was heard inquiring of every one he met where he could find Miss Ashton and Mr. Ronaldson. Colonel Forbes listened in an agony of annoyance. " Stay at Maplestead ! " he thought to himself ; " no, that she should not ; if his fortune depended upon it. To be kept waiting by his wife's maid—to hear her name called out in that way in an inn ! it was atrocious. Ronaldson !

what business had he at Rilworth? He would have nothing of that kind going on in his household. No dangling nonsense and folly. If Katharine Ashton did not know better how to conduct herself than that, the sooner she left Maplestead the better. It was a disgrace—a perfect disgrace.” In a few moments he had become so indignant that he actually did believe he was himself disgraced by something which Katharine had done.

Crewe knocked at the door of the room in which he was told that Katharine was, and instantly afterwards, throwing it open, announced that Miss Ashton must not keep the Colonel another minute, for he was quite tired of waiting. Katharine looked extremely vexed, but not in the least confused: Charles very much, as if he could have knocked Crewe down, had not an appealing glance from Katharine restrained him. He hesitated about following her; but she turned round to him, and said, in a quiet, self-possessed way, which perfectly bewildered Crewe: “Yes, come, I wish it;” and they went out together. Crewe followed with a lowering brow. Colonel Forbes leant forward in the carriage as she drew near, and, studiously avoiding Charles, but fixing his eyes upon her with a look which he meant to be annihilating, said, “You will be good enough another time, Miss Ashton, to remember punctuality.”—“I am very sorry, sir,” replied Katharine; but she ventured upon no excuse.—“Well, let me have no further waiting.” He motioned to her to take her place in the back seat. Katharine turned to Charles, and said, in a voice which every one might hear, “Good-bye, Mr. Ronaldson, and thank you.” There was a very cordial shake of the hand; Charles assisted Katharine to her seat, and the carriage drove off.

“Miss Ashton, I wish to speak with you in my study.” Most alarming words to Katharine—most agreeable to Crewe! He was glad that he was not to be examined himself; he might have found it difficult to make out a case against Katharine; but she was certain, he thought, to inculcate herself. Colonel Forbes was just in that state of mind which magnifies the least offence into a crime. Crewe had remarked quite enough to convince him that Katharine’s feeling for Charles Ronaldson went beyond that of ordinary friendship; and, whether engaged to him or not, Colonel Forbes was equally likely to be displeased. He never realised the fact, that persons out of his own sphere in life ever really fell in love, or indeed had any right to do so; like pheasant and partridge shooting, it seemed a privilege peculiarly reserved for the fortunate individuals “who live at home at ease,” and have nothing else to

occupy them. And as to any member of his own household having a feeling approaching to attachment—much more venturing to form an engagement—without his full consent, it was little less than high treason.

Crewe's opinion was well founded—at least to a certain extent. Colonel Forbes felt himself an injured man; and, as most injured men would have done in his place, had in his own mind tried, condemned, and sentenced the culprit many times during that short drive from Rilworth to Maplestead. But there was something in Katharine's quiet dignity, when she appeared before him, which baffled all his intentions of awing her at once into the confession of her fault. It was as perplexing as the cordial "good-bye, and thank you," which remained in his memory in spite of his prejudices, and suggested that it was impossible for one so open and simple to have offended in any degree against the laws of good taste and right feeling.

Still he was not a man to yield to weak impressions from mere manner, and he placed himself in his arm-chair, in an attitude at once commanding and easy—a happy mixture of the magisterial and the gentleman-like; and, motioning to Katharine to be seated also, said: "I have sent for you, Miss Ashton, at once, because I feel that it is better in all cases to have no delay in matters concerning the regulation of my household. In Mrs. Forbes' state of health, many things which would of themselves fall naturally under the notice of the mistress of the family are forced upon mine. I am unfortunately compelled to be cognisant of them, and I must, therefore, of necessity remark upon them. A very painful duty this is, in some cases, especially where reproof is involved; reproof,"—and he looked at her sternly, "of those who, having great trust reposed in them, are peculiarly called upon to set an example of propriety of behaviour. I have been grieved to-day, Miss Ashton—deeply grieved; I do not wish to enter into details; your own conscience will sufficiently suggest the cause I have for addressing you in this manner; but I wish to put you on your guard. Mrs. Forbes is much attached to you, and I do not pretend to deny that she has great reason to be so. You have shown yourself most devoted to her service; but no amount of consideration for you will render either her or myself insensible to the duties incumbent upon us as being at the head of a large household. It is our first duty to see that decorum is observed in it; and if those who are dependent upon us choose to transgress the laws of decorum, there is but one alternative—they must leave us. I do not mean," he added, observing Katharine change colour,

"that your conduct has yet been such as to bring us to this distressing decision; I wish only to warn you, that you may be on your guard for the future. In the meantime I should wish to make some inquiries, to which I trust you will not object to give a straightforward answer. May I ask how long you have been acquainted with Mr. Ronaldson?"

"From childhood, sir, and we are engaged to be married."

Poor Colonel Forbes! What a downfall! After that long speech, that well-turned, dignified, almost paternal address, which he had studied, as he was accustomed to study his speeches in parliament, to find that there was nothing more to be said! No wonder that he had no sympathy for Katharine's weakness—no pity for the blood which crimsoned her cheek till the tears stood in her eyes, or the tremulous voice which, although each word was uttered quite clearly, seemed as if it came from the depths of her heart, so low and changed was its tone. He went on mercilessly: "Engaged! Very strange! most strange! very unfitting! without any person's knowledge!"—"Mr. and Mrs. Reeves have known it from the beginning, sir," said Katharine, venturing to interrupt him.—"From the beginning? what beginning? I wish to have no beginnings in my house. Very unpardonable conduct, indeed! The last thing I should have expected. May I inquire how long this engagement of which you speak has lasted?"—"About three quarters of a year, sir. Mr. Ronaldson and myself were engaged before I entered Mrs. Forbes' service."—"Then you came under false pretences," exclaimed Colonel Forbes, his eyes flashing; "or did Mrs. Forbes know this? Has she encouraged it?"—"Mrs. Forbes knows nothing, sir," said Katharine, beginning to feel more frightened than she had anticipated, since she had imagined that when the truth was known no one could find fault with her. "It was on her account that I persuaded Mr. Ronaldson to allow of our engagement being a secret. I feared that if Mrs. Forbes knew it, she would not like me to bind myself to attend upon her."—"What? I don't understand you." Colonel Forbes was quite right; he did not at all understand. Accustomed to look through his narrow worldly telescope, he could not at once reach the sphere of higher motives by which persons like Katharine were actuated.—"I have often wished lately, sir," continued Katharine, her voice becoming more steady and her manner calmer, "that Mrs. Forbes did know of my engagement; in fact, it was only this very day Mr. Ronaldson and myself agreed that it ought not any longer to be kept from her."—"It was a pity that you had not thought so long before," said

Colonel Forbes, interrupting her hastily ; but Katharine went on as composedly as ever. — “When I offered to be Mrs. Forbes’ maid, sir, she was much too ill to bear any thing like a shock, or indeed even ordinary excitement. I had then but one thought on my mind—to wait upon her, and nurse her ; to repay, if I could, some small portion of the infinite obligation I am under for years of kindness.” She paused, but, finding that Colonel Forbes did not reply, she continued : — “My wish was granted, sir, and I thank you for it, from the very bottom of my heart I thank you. Whatever change of plan your knowledge of my position may make, I can have but one feeling of deep gratitude, first, to God, for having given me the thought, and next to you, for having been the means of enabling me to fulfil a service, the remembrance of which will be a blessing to the latest hour of my existence. As regards my conduct to-day,” she added, “it was not, I confess, strictly according to established rules ; but perhaps Mr. Crewe will, if asked, acknowledge that it was his insolence which made me hastily seek protection from the only person in the world of whom I have a right to claim it.”

Katharine was silent. Colonel Forbes raised his head, which, while she had been speaking, he had leant upon his hand. He looked grave and unusually pale. “And how long was this agreement with Mrs. Forbes to last ?” he asked in a softened tone. — “We could not say, sir ; it depended upon circumstances ?” — “Upon Mrs. Forbes ?” — “Partly, sir ; I could not leave her if she were very ill. But Mr. Ronaldson has been offered the Rilworth agency, and that would make a great difference, because I still should be in the neighbourhood, and able to attend upon Mrs. Forbes, if she wished it, at any moment.” — “And Mr. Ronaldson consented to your undertaking this service ; binding yourself in this way in spite of your engagement ?” said Colonel Forbes. — “My promise to Mrs. Forbes, sir, was given before my engagement was formed. Mr. Ronaldson would have been the last person to wish me to break it.” — “And he did not object ? he did not think that you were lowering yourself ?” — “Mr. Ronaldson, sir, thinks as I do, that we can never lower ourselves by performing the duties which God is pleased to set before us.” Again Colonel Forbes’ face was hidden as he leant down with his forehead resting on his hand. There was a silence of some seconds ; then he said, scarcely looking up as he spoke, “Miss Ashton, your explanation is perfectly satisfactory.” And Katharine rose to retire. “Will you allow me, sir, to ask that Mrs. Forbes may not be told without my knowledge.” — “Certainly,

you may depend upon it;" and Katharine closed the door, and Colonel Forbes leant back in his chair, to think.

To think! had he ever more cause to think? for what a new light had broken in upon him! Disinterestedness, unselfishness, self-denial,—he had heard of these things before; he fancied that he understood them; but they were not the same virtues when practised in his own circle of friends as when seen in the conduct of Katharine Ashton. He could almost have said it was a wild enthusiasm—a romantic attachment—that Katharine loved Jane more than she did Charles, and therefore had been consulting her own pleasure in sacrificing one to the other. But Charles Ronaldson had consented likewise; he had put aside pride and personal feelings, and consented, as it seemed willingly, that Katharine should separate herself from him, lower herself in the eyes of many, subject herself to the restraints of domestic service,—for what? Was it folly, or coldness? or was it that which Colonel Forbes had often described, but never practised—Christian unselfishness? He thought—it was great pain, but something within seemed to compel him to dwell upon it—of what he would have done for Jane,—what he had done. He remembered how he had thwarted, fretted, contradicted, blamed her; in all cases consulted his own will. How, when her health was in jeopardy, he had urged her to exertions beyond her strength; how, even when he had tried to please her, it was never at his own expense. Katharine Ashton in a lower rank of life, with no claim except that of early acquaintance and affection, could sacrifice time and freedom, and the feelings of all others the dearest to human nature, and not even put herself in the way of receiving gratitude in return—and he had given up nothing; he knew not, except by name, the meaning of self-denial. He had lived for himself; his best actions, his highest virtues in the sight of men, were but the tinsel fruits of a mean and miserable calculation for his own aggrandisement. God had bestowed upon him fortune, intellect, influence, blessed him in his domestic relations, given him a wife, whose only defect seemed to be her power of self-sacrifice for him, and children, whose simple innocence might day by day have been a lesson of the purity and beauty of Heaven. His life had been one unbroken series of successes in whatever he attempted; and now, when he looked back upon the road he had travelled, in what position did he find himself—nearer to or farther from his Maker?

Conscience gave a mournful answer. There had been a time,—how well he remembered it! for it was the one green and

freshening spot in the dreary wilderness of a life passed in the service of self—when he had known the rejoicing thrill of hallowed enthusiasm, the strong energy of devoted purpose, the free lightness of heart, of a spirit which has given itself with intensity of will to the service of its Creator. That time had been when he first knew Jane, when he caught the inspiration of her heavenly love, and shared in the purity and gladness of her exalted hopes. But it had passed; the very love which first raised his heart to God afterwards became his snare. The selfishness which he had nurtured in his breast from childhood re-entered his earthly paradise in the guise of an angel of light, and the affections which should have guided him on his way to Heaven led him down to the darkness of earth. He could trace the gradual decay now by the light shed upon his conscience—by the sight of pure unselfishness. He could see how, by degrees, he had fallen short, suffering his love to be an excuse for the neglect of small duties, whilst still retaining the tastes which charmed him from their elevation and refinement; and then endeavouring to tempt Jane to like neglect; and when he found he could not succeed, throwing himself again into the spirit of her holier feelings; not because he loved them, but because they were pleasing to her. And so began that fatal deception which led him to place himself at her feet, and listen to all she said, as to “the very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, whilst he heard her words, but did them not.” At that time he had no fear of being led to neglect any duties. He thought that he had a guardian angel always at hand; he loved her so dearly, and made himself so entirely one with her, that he imagined, when he entirely approved of her charity and self-denial, that he was charitable and self-denying himself. He could not believe this now, for the first delirium of affection had long vanished; his wife had sunk to the level of mortality, their interests had in many instances been separated, his enthusiasm was gone, but the selfishness which he had fostered under its shadow remained to be his curse and his reproach. And yet on Colonel Forbes’ table there were lying at that moment letters from men of talent and high principle, acknowledging his unflinching integrity, and complimenting him upon his sound judgment; letters from bishops, and rectors, and curates, appealing to him as the patron of all that was good and religious in the land; petitions from the poor and oppressed, entreating his aid, as the person the most able and certainly the most willing to aid them in their difficulties. Could

they all be deceived? Colonel Forbes did not answer the question in words, but in feeling,—a feeling of humiliation, bitter, intense. But how long would it endure?

CHAPTER LXVIII.

A MONTH afterwards and Katharine was again summoned to Colonel Forbes' study—not by Crewe. There had been a strange alteration in the Maplestead household. Crewe was gone. Mrs. Brown said she knew why, and hinted that he had reasons for being Miss Ashton's enemy for life; but Katharine merely remarked that she was surprised a man of his character could so long have deceived Colonel Forbes, and then changed the conversation. The new man was remarkably civil to the lady's maid; perhaps he took his tone from that of others; perhaps he had been warned that female influence was at that time paramount at Maplestead. Certainly Colonel Forbes' manner to Katharine must have had some influence in teaching his servants the light in which he himself regarded her. He did not intend to make it different from what it had been; but respect shows itself unconsciously, and as Colonel Forbes' respect had deepened, so also had his attention increased. Not that he felt quite comfortable in Katharine's presence: she was still a problem to him. He could have understood her a great deal better if she had been born in his own station, and mixed in his own society. He was a man full of prejudices, which he had never taken the trouble to combat; narrow minded, because he had never looked upon human life except in a worldly point of view. The large circle of the Christian Church, embracing within itself all orders and all ranks, and giving to each class, and each individual in that class, a work without which the happiness of the whole could not be complete, was as unreal to him as the myths of ancient historical records. It might be true, or it might not; but it was nothing to him. He lived for a select, exclusive circle; he believed that others did the same. The power which should unite them all in one was unknown to him.

Yet Katharine was a lady; he felt that, and it was his great difficulty. She was a lady, because she had the true spirit of a lady. She did what every one who wishes to be so thoroughly must do. She kept precisely in the position in which the provi-

dence of God had placed her. She was perfectly unpretending, simple in dress, gentle and unassuming in manner; her taste and tact were those of the most refined education. When he contrasted her with his wife, he could see that Jane had more outward polish, that she was more graceful, more accomplished, and better informed, that her accent was softer; but the difference went no further. He had seen hundreds of women moving in the fashionable circles of society obtrusive, flirting, noisy, or even, with great apparent elegance, civilly impertinent and contemptuous, who could not have been named in the same breath with Katharine Ashton for real refinement. What was the cause of her superiority? Nature might have done something, but it could not have done all. She had had few advantages of education; none of society, beyond the little she might have met at the house of Mr. Reeves. She had always moved in what might be called her own set, except of late, when she might be said to have left it for one which was lower; but she was a lady in the true sense of the word still. And why? It was nothing outward. Colonel Forbes felt strongly that the very instant any one should attempt to move her out of her natural place, and make her assume the manners and habits of those above her, that moment the charm would be gone. Katharine Ashton dignified her position; her position did not dignify her: that was the essential distinction. She dignified it by taking it from the Hand of God, and using it as the means of promoting His glory. If she had once attempted to divert it to her own service, her power would have been over.

Jane did not yet know of Katharine's engagement: it was Katharine's particular request that she should not be told till Charles Ronaldson's removal to Rilworth should be a matter of such absolute certainty—humanly speaking—as not to admit of a doubt. This morning, however, the letter conveying the intelligence that the change was finally decided upon had arrived, and Katharine was wishing to see Colonel Forbes upon the subject at the very moment he sent for her.

"Pray sit down, Miss Ashton." There was marked courtesy in Colonel Forbes' manner now, and even more than that—gentleness and interest. "I sent to ask your opinion about a little plan I have in my mind for Mrs. Forbes. I wanted to know if you thought she would be equal to it. The Duchess of Lowther has begged us to go to Rilworth Castle for a few days: she thinks the change may be good. What do you say?" Katharine was taken very much by surprise. Jane had not left home now for some months. "It would not be a long journey," continued

Colonel Forbes; "and she might be as quiet as she liked when she was once there." — "But, I suppose, there would be a good many persons in the house, sir," said Katharine. — "Probably; but they would not come in the way. She might breakfast and dine alone; in fact, live quite by herself if she wished it. I think it might be a good thing for her; but of course I would not urge it." He said this in an apologetic tone. Some inward feeling always made him anxious now to excuse himself to Katharine whenever he did or said any thing tending to selfishness. "If she could be quite quiet," began Katharine, doubtfully. — "Oh! you might be assured of that. I should take every precaution myself, and indeed I should insist upon it that it was so. I think she would like it." — "It might be an amusement to her," observed Katharine, "and it would be change of air." — "Yes, and Dr. Lowe recommends both, if they could be had without fatigue. But still I would not urge it, and give up the idea for myself." — "I would take every care of Mrs. Forbes, sir," said Katharine, "if you were obliged to leave her." — "I should not leave her," was the rather short reply. Katharine felt a little thrown back, afraid that perhaps she had jarred upon him by some unintentional forwardness of tone or manner, so she merely observed that Mrs. Forbes had seemed stronger the last few weeks. He paused again, and then said with some abruptness, "Dr. Lowe rests a great deal upon her gaining strength?" — "Yes." But there was no assent to Colonel Forbes' meaning, though there was to his actual words. He caught the accent of doubt and said: "You don't think she is gaining strength?" — "I can't say, sir; she has seemed able to do more the last few days," said Katharine. Colonel Forbes sighed deeply. "It is her appetite which seems to fail most now," continued Katharine. — "Change might be good for that," he remarked; but there was very little hope or energy in his tone. "I should think it might be, sir," was Katharine's cautious answer. — "And you would go with us, Miss Ashton?" The question was so strange that Katharine was quite confused in replying to it. "I could not take her without you," continued Colonel Forbes. — "Certainly not, sir, — of course, — I never thought it possible," replied Katharine; "that is, as long — if I am permitted to remain with her." — "Yes, as long," repeated Colonel Forbes, thoughtfully. "May I be allowed to ask you a question? When do you think your engagement must terminate?" — "I was wishing to speak to you upon the subject, sir," said Katharine, blushing. "I have heard —" — "And so have I," said Colonel Forbes quickly, "Mr. Ronaldson

is to come to Rilworth immediately; it was that which made me anxious to know your plans." — "There are none formed yet, sir," replied Katharine; "but I suppose Mr. Ronaldson would not like, would wish —" — "To have them soon settled," said Colonel Forbes, gravely, but good-naturedly; "very natural. Do you think the time would be as much as two months?" — "I should like to consult Mrs. Forbes' wishes as much as possible, sir," said Katharine. "I could not be happy in leaving her without some one who would really look after her." — "Then it might be as well to let her know soon," said Colonel Forbes; "there would be more time then to inquire for some one to supply your place; as far, that is, as it can be supplied. I think you said you would like to make the communication yourself?" — "If you have no objection, sir." — "And it should be done without delay," said Colonel Forbes; "otherwise, if she should distress herself much, it might interfere with my proposed plan of taking her to Rilworth Castle." There was a good deal of the old feeling about this. He was very anxious for the visit, and disliked the idea of any thing which might interfere with it. "I would tell Mrs. Forbes to-day, sir," said Katharine, "if you thought it right. I think she will not care much now that I can be with her at any moment if she should want me." — "You must not go far away, Miss Ashton," said Colonel Forbes, with a smile which was kind, though his manner was stiff. — "Mr. Ronaldson has an idea of taking the Duke of Lowther's small farm of Westbank, sir," said Katharine; "that would be only a quarter of a mile from the lower lodge." — "Oh! a very good arrangement. I trust it may answer." Colonel Forbes thought a moment, and added, "Mr. Ronaldson, I conclude, would not like so large a farm as Moorlands, as his time will be so occupied elsewhere? It may be vacant again soon." Katharine's heart was very full with many mixed feelings. She had great difficulty in expressing them; yet gratitude was uppermost. She felt as if Colonel Forbes must have conquered much of undefined antipathy to herself, and old annoying recollections of her brother, to make this proposal. "You are very, very kind, sir," she began; "indeed, you are very kind; and Mr. Ronaldson would be most grateful for the offer; but I could not say for him." — "Only would you like it?" inquired Colonel Forbes. — "I don't quite know, sir." Her eyes were dimmed with tears. "I think it would be happy in some ways; not in all; — perhaps," and she smiled, "a new life had better begin in a new place." Colonel Forbes felt a little damped. He had not yet learnt to throw himself into the minds of others

so as to judge correctly of their feelings. He became rather more stiff, and renewed the subject of the visit to Rilworth Castle. They would stay a week, he said; it would not be worth while to go for a shorter time. He should wish Katharine to say nothing on the subject until after she had made her own communication. Katharine merely replied that she would certainly take an opportunity of talking to Mrs. Forbes in the course of the day, and then, with her usual curtsy, retired.

Colonel Forbes felt very uncomfortable when she was gone; he knew he had been so cold, but he could not forget his old manner. He was angry with himself, however, now; — in former days he would have been angry with Katharine. It was very hard up-hill work, at his age, to unlearn the lessons which he had been taught from his infancy. — Nature, or rather habit, that second nature, would often have its way. — Yet he was, in a measure, improving; if he was not yet unselfish from Christian principles, he at least seldom or never acted selfishly without having a feeling of self-reproach.

Katharine went up to Jane and found her with the children, looking particularly happy, if not particularly well. Yet there had been, upon the whole, a marked change for the better, within the last few months. Katharine could not help now and then hoping that, after all, her affection might have exaggerated the weakness of Jane's constitution; and that, now that her mind was quieter, her physical frame would recover its strength, and the threatened evil be averted at least for years. "Mamma says we shall be going to London again, soon," said Lucy, running up to Katharine, as she entered the room, "and that you will go with us." — "We hope so," said Jane, gently; "we should not like to go any where without Miss Ashton, Lucy, should we?" — "And then we will take you about to see all the sights," said Philip: but a long time ago, we wanted you to go to London, and Papa did not like it." — "Hush! Philip," said Lucy; "you should not say that." — "But it is true," retorted Philip. "I remember it quite well. It was one day we were playing in the long walk, together; and then, — I forget exactly what — only I remember afterwards, Papa told me he did not want Miss Ashton to go to London." — "Papa did not know Miss Ashton as well then as he does now," said Jane; "that makes all the difference. But you must go to Mademoiselle, now, my darlings, for Miss Ashton and I have something to say to each other." The two children ran up, as usual, to their Mamma, to be kissed; and Philip, as he was leaving the room, came back again, and insisted

upon putting his arm round Katharine's neck, and whispering, as a great secret, that he loved her dearly, and he should not at all like to go to London without her.

The expression of Katharine's face struck Jane as sorrowful,—and when Philip was gone, she said to her affectionately :—“ You are not vexed, dear Katharine, at any nonsense the children have talked ? Times are very much altered, as you know, since then.” —“ Yes, indeed, they are,” replied Katharine, “ I was not thinking of that, I assure you, Ma'am. Might I ring for your luncheon, if you are inclined for it ? ” —“ It is not luncheon time yet,” said Jane, looking at her watch. “ Please give me my work, and sit down for a few minutes, unless you are very busy.” —“ I could not be busy, if you want me, Ma'am,” said Katharine, “ and I had something to say to you, if it would not worry you to listen.” —“ Not very much,” said Jane, with a playful smile. —“ And I am not in a humour to be worried to-day. Oh ! Katharine, it is such a blessing to feel something more in health, both in mind and body ; ” and as Katharine brought her work, she made her sit down on a low chair by the sofa, and added : “ Now make me your confessor, and tell me what is in your mind.” Katharine hesitated. “ Shall I help you ? ” continued Jane, in the same light tone ; but seeing that Katharine looked pale and nervous, her voice changed, and she said, — “ There is not any thing really the matter, dear Katharine ? ” —“ Nothing of consequence—in the house, or about the servants,” replied Katharine, knowing that Jane's thoughts would naturally turn in that direction ; “ and nothing really the matter, at all,” she added, observing that Jane still looked suspicious of evil : “ but I am afraid,—it has come into my mind, that perhaps I may not be able to go to London with you.” —“ Because of that foolish speech, that nonsense of the children,” exclaimed Jane. “ Oh, Katharine, how could you for an instant remember it ? ” —“ Not for that ! ” replied Katharine, eagerly ; “ Oh, no, indeed : but I think there may be difficulties.” Jane gazed at her with a look of alarm. “ Dear Mrs. Forbes,—forgive me,—I am engaged to be married to Mr. Ronaldson ; ” and Katharine's composure quite gave way, and her tears fell very fast. She did not see the expression of Jane's face, for she had covered her own with both her hands. Perhaps it was well she did not. It might have given her a pang which she could not have forgotten. She only felt the warm kiss imprinted on her forehead, and heard the sweet, though now low and trembling voice, which whispered : “ Thank God ! dear Katharine, for your sake ! ” —Katharine could not look up, — but she went on

speaking, rapidly. — "He is coming to Rilworth to live, and he does not like any delay. Dear Mrs. Forbes, I must leave you." Poor Katharine! her tears became almost sobs, the confession was much worse than she expected. She had been very abrupt! She was not saying at all what she had intended, and at the moment of speaking she felt that she was doing harm. But she had miscalculated Jane's strength; at least, for that instant. She was exceedingly quiet, — soothing in voice and manner as she might have been to a child, — and fondly she placed her hand on Katharine's head, and again and again kissed her forehead, forgetting all worldly distance and distinction, — every thing but the deep love which had grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength. "And you do not think me unkind and selfish?" began Katharine; "you do not think I could leave you if you were not stronger?" — "I do not think you could do any thing but what is most good and considerate for every body," said Jane, interrupting her. "God forbid that I should give you cause to grieve for having come to me, because I was selfish in parting from you. Oh! Katharine, I could not be so ungrateful for that which has been the greatest blessing of my life." Katharine looked up with a smile brightening her face. Jane's eye rested on a small and most beautifully bound Bible which lay on her work-table. It had been Colonel Forbes' present to her that morning, because he said that it tired her to hold a larger book; and there were rare flowers on the table which she had especially longed to see; and beside her lay a little pencil note which he had sent her from his study, fixing the hour at which he would drive with her to see some poor person about whom she was anxious. She made no comment, however, upon these things, but merely said, "All has been different, dear Katharine, since you came." — "And there will be no real change when I am gone," replied Katharine, reading her thoughts. Jane put her hand to her eye to wipe away a tear, yet she smiled instantly afterwards, and said: "I must not complain if my nurse is still near; and you will remain at Rilworth, you say?" — "Almost at Maplestead," replied Katharine, "Mr. Ronaldson talks of taking the Duke of Lowther's farm at Westbank." Jane was silent, but the muscles of her throat moved convulsively. She laid down her work, and stood up. "I am going to my room, dear Katharine," she said, "don't let any one come to me if you can help it." She stooped, as if intending to kiss Katharine again, but it seemed as if she could not trust herself, and slowly she left the room; and Katharine listened to her light step crossing the gallery, and heard her enter her chamber and bolt the door.

She did not appear for another hour.—Then she was very pale but quite cheerful, and went out for her drive with Colonel Forbes, and dined with him as usual; but whenever Katharine was in the room, Jane's eyes lingered upon her with that gaze of yearning tenderness which is the language of those to whom God has denied the power of venting their feelings in words.

CHAPTER LXIX.

RILWORTH CASTLE! It was a place of which Katharine had heard from infancy, which she had seen occasionally in the distance, and now and then had heard described; but this was all she knew about it, though it was only seven miles from the town. It was not a show place, so there had been no excuse for making excursions to see it. The Duke of Lowther happened to be very fond of it, and spent a larger portion of his time there than at his splendid seat in the north; but there was really nothing in it very remarkable. Castle, in fact, it was not. Tradition said there had been such a place once, and a piece of an old wall in the park was pointed out as having formed part of the original building; but Rilworth Castle now was a substantial, gothic house, built round a quadrangle, with an attempt at cloisters on three sides, a little turret at the north-east angle, and a tolerably handsome gateway at the entrance, surmounted by the ducal arms. The house certainly was not striking in beauty, yet Rilworth Castle was a place which on the whole had great charms. It stood high, and there was exceeding beauty in the glimpses of richly-wooded country, and far blue distance, seen at the extremity of the broad walks shaded by splendid trees, by which the grounds immediately adjoining the house were intersected; and there was a flower garden on one side, quaint, and formal, and brilliant with all the hues of the rainbow, such as the most fastidious of gardeners might have envied; and a very pretty little village, with ornamented cottages, close at hand, to give occupation to any one who might desire it; and, above all, a most perfect and picturesque old church, properly cared for, and within a convenient distance of the house. Very pleasant objects to look at. And Rilworth Castle was a very pleasant house to stay at. Hunting and shooting, politics and theology, poetry and art, music and dancing, gossip and embroidery; there was something to suit

every taste. And the Duke was very good, though a little prosy, and the Duchess extremely kind and hospitable; and the grown-up sons and daughters, who congregated around them, were, for the most part, clever and amiable; so that, without any exception, it was the most popular house in the country. But it was not particularly agreeable, but only particularly odd to Katharine, to find herself on the road to Rilworth Castle: it produced a wonderful confusion in her memory. Barnes—Colonel Forbes' new man—a very discreet and respectful person, could scarcely extract a word from her during the journey. She could think of nothing but that old, long past away absurdity, the Union Ball at the Bear, and the poor Duchess's discomfiture, and Lady Marchmont's graceful dancing, and Colonel Forbes' wasted energies, and George Andrews' pretension, and Selina, and Martha Dobson, and her own dear father and mother, and that strange, quiet, shy, thoughtful individual, whom now——Yes, life was indeed stranger than romance. To look back upon it, and read it, and understand it, how very wonderful, yet how infinitely merciful was the arrangement of its every detail! The carriage entered the park, and Barnes pointed out the best view, and was proud to do the honours, for he had once lived in the Duke of Lowther's service. But he could only gain a quiet assent of admiration from Katharine, whose chief thought, as they drew near the house, was how she should undergo the ordeal of meeting the innumerable ladies' maids whose acquaintance doubtless she would have to make. Mrs. Brown had warned her that the Castle was always full, even when the Duchess professed to have no one there; and urged her to make herself smart, as it would be expected of her. But Katharine's black dress saved her from any such painful necessity; and, what was still better, she had a private assurance from Jane, that, beyond the necessity of joining the regular housekeeper's party at meal times, she would be at liberty to remain by herself as much as she chose. Forgetfulness of self, however, was her great assistance now, as it had been many times before in her life. As soon as the carriage stopped, she might have been in the presence of royalty, and she would have been unembarrassed, for all her thought was for Jane; all her anxiety, to know whether she felt over fatigued by the long drive; and when the inquiry was answered by a bright smile, and a "thank you! I really think I am refreshed," her heart bounded so lightly, that the appearance of all the ladies' maids at the same moment, begging for an introduction, would have failed to disturb her equanimity. "This way, Miss, if you please," said one of the men-servants,

who was assisting in carrying the luggage up the stairs; and Katharine was ushered through innumerable passages, and made to mount broad stairs and narrow ones, and turn to north, south, east, and west, till all her dawning notions of the topography of the house were utterly confounded; and at last she was left in a huge apartment, much larger than Jane's at Maplestead, with the information that Mrs. Forbes' boudoir was within, and the maid's beyond.

Katharine thought it all very grand, and comfortless, though there was ample furniture in the room, and a large blazing fire. It took her so long to walk from one end of the apartment to the other, that she felt as if half her days would be wasted in wandering from the wardrobe to the bureau, and from the bureau to the wardrobe. And when she began the business of unpacking, every thing seemed to have a knack of putting itself in the wrong place, and nothing was to be found that was wanted. She began to be quite alarmed at last, for the dressing bell rang, and Jane she was sure would appear to be dressed for dinner, long before any thing could be ready for her. After all, it was doubtful whether she really was fitted for the office of lady's maid. But Jane came up stairs, tired, and not inclined to go down till the evening, and then Katharine was in her element again; and when she had made the little boudoir exactly what she thought Jane would like, and established her there upon the sofa, with a cup of coffee, which was the only thing she fancied, every thing seemed quite natural and home-like; most especially when Jane looked up at her with her bewitching smile of gratitude, and said, "Ah! Katharine, Rilworth Castle was never so pleasant to me before."

It was not at all home-like, however, to be summoned down stairs to tea. Such an array of ladies' maids; such silk gowns, and ribbons, and brooches! and such etiquettes and proprieties! If any thing could have discomposed her, the ceremonies of the housekeeper's room unquestionably would; but Katharine was not in a mood to be affected by them, and only smiled to herself as she thought how she should amuse Charles by describing them.

Jane was amused, too, when Katharine went upstairs to her again, and gave an account of her entertainment. It was a new life to her, for she had never liked to talk to her former attendant upon such subjects, though Laurette would have gossiped interminably if permitted. She was rather anxious, though, for Katharine's comfort, and afraid that her good taste and refinement of feeling might be offended by the absurd display and

pretension, which could scarcely be avoided where there was such a mixture of society.—But Katharine put all fears to flight by her quiet remark : “ You know, Ma’am, we can’t always expect to meet people who understand how to keep their station ; but it does not signify as long as we keep our own.” Jane had often felt that in her own circle, for human nature is the same everywhere, and vulgarity, like true politeness, is confined to no rank.

And that first evening at Rilworth Castle was passed by Katharine as quietly as it would have been at Maplestead. Mrs. Forbes went to the drawing-room, and she sat in her own chamber, writing to Charles. She had little curiosity as to any thing that was going on in the house, except that she thought it would be pleasant, if there should happen to be any dancing, to watch Lady Marchmont, and see whether the years which had passed over her head since the Union Ball, had in any way diminished her grace and beauty. But there were only distant sounds of some very sweet singing, and the notes of a harp. About ten o’clock, Jane came upstairs to go to bed. She was looking weary, and said that the evening had been dull rather than otherwise, for the gentlemen would get together and talk politics, and the ladies were rather stiff. The next day, however, there were to be more arrivals, some very agreeable people ; and there was an idea of making a large riding party, and going to see the ruins of a large abbey about twelve miles off. A cousin of Lady Marchmont, who was staying in the house, had never been there ; and it was thought that it might be a pleasant expedition.

“ They have been trying to persuade Colonel Forbes to go,” she added, with a happy smile, as she sat down by the fire, and Katharine began to unfasten the pearl spray in her hair ; “ but he seemed inclined to say, ‘ no.’ The Duchess told me she was sure he was afraid I should fall into some mischief if he left me, and I do think he is very anxious about my being kept quiet.”—“ Colonel Forbes made so many promises that you should be quiet, Ma’am,” said Katharine, “ he is bound to keep his word.”—“ From fear of your grave looks also, Katharine,” replied Jane ; “ I am sure he stands in considerable awe of you.” She spoke playfully ; but a sigh followed, and she added, gravely, “ I am not sure that I do not feel some awe of you myself now. You are not quite what you were.” Katharine smiled, and said she did not feel like what she was, herself ; it was all very strange, she could not understand it. Jane became very thoughtful. “ You must explain it more to me to-morrow,” she said, “ some things perplex me since I have been thinking it all over ; and Colonel Forbes

says—" she paused as if she had a difficulty in expressing herself, and then added in a tone of affectionate reproach.—" Katharine, I thought you would have told me every thing."—"I would, if I might, Ma'am," replied Katharine, simply ; " and I will, if I may, to-morrow. I think to-night you ought to go to-bed."

" Colonel Forbes knew of your engagement before I did," continued Jane, in a musing tone.—" Only because it seemed better that he should," replied Katharine.—" And he knew the sacrifice you made for me;" said Jane, turning suddenly round, and looking at her intently. Katharine knelt down by the side of the chair, and raising Jane's hand to her lips, said : " Dear Mrs. Forbes, he knew only what I could not venture to say to you, that the sacrifice of years, instead of months, of earthly happiness, would have been all too little for one who long ago guided me on the way to Heaven. Please, may the subject never be mentioned between us again?" Jane's eyes glistened, and as she laid her hand upon Katharine's she said,—" There is a blessing which descends from generation to generation. Katharine, it will surely be yours." It was all that was said, but the words were graven upon Katharine's heart, deep as a promise which shall never be broken.

CHAPTER LXX.

A BRILLIANT morning—a bright sun—a sky sufficiently clouded for beauty, but not for fear—a fresh, yet warm spring breeze—what could be more inviting for the expedition to Liscombe Abbey? Katharine, when she went down stairs to breakfast, heard the proposal discussed with considerable animation in the housekeeper's room. She could almost have supposed that the ladies' maids, and the gentlemen's gentlemen, were bent upon joining it themselves, so eager were their conjectures as to the chances of a fine day, and so vehement the contests as to the horses and their riders. Her chief interest was centred in knowing whether Colonel Forbes was likely to be of the party: in her own heart she very much wished he might not be. The Duchess was so overpoweringly anxious and goodnatured, that, if he were absent, she was likely to tire Mrs. Forbes with kindness; and Katharine had already been informed by Lady Marchmont's maid, who knew every thing about every body, that it was the general opinion at Rilworth Castle, that Mrs. Forbes was cooped up a good deal too much, and that the Colonel kept her quite a prisoner,

and something like an insinuation had been made, that it was the Duchess's full intention to break through the old system of seclusion, and bring poor Mrs. Forbes out again. Katharine was expected to give either an assent or a contradiction to these surmises, and when neither could be extracted from her, she was pronounced, by Lady Marchmont's maid, dreadfully proud and close; a condemnation which, although uttered so loudly that she could not help hearing it, was very comfortably indifferent to her.

"Miss Ashton has seen nothing of the Castle, yet," said the housekeeper, with an appealing look to several of the party, who were well acquainted with it; "I should think it might be agreeable to go round with her when the riders have started, and her Grace is in the morning room." Barnes, who naturally felt particularly at home, and liked to show that he was, professed extreme willingness to take upon himself the office of leader, if he might be permitted; asserting that he knew where all the curiosities came from, and could tell the names of every picture in the long gallery: and one or two other strangers, like Katharine, seized upon the idea, as a very pleasant way of ridding themselves of the tedium of a long morning. It was settled, therefore, that they were to meet in the housekeeper's room at twelve o'clock, and Katharine then went up stairs again to be ready for any thing that Mrs. Forbes might require. The Castle hours were very late, and she found Colonel Forbes in his wife's room reading to her, according to what was now his usual custom. He was urgent that Jane should have her breakfast at once, and alone. The Duchess, he said, never made her appearance till ten o'clock, and the breakfast was an interminable affair. Jane had much better take hers as she was accustomed, no one would remark upon it; in fact it was quite the common practice of the house. He should be inclined to stay with her himself, he added, only he wanted to hear a little what the plans for the day were. "You are going with them all to Liscombe, dear Philip, are you not?" said Jane. "I hope you would not think of staying at home for me."—"I am not sure, my dear; Liscombe is nothing new, and you would like me to drive you out."—"Oh! the Duchess will do that," replied Jane; "she told me she would last night—please don't let that prevent you."—"But she will tire you to death, my dear, with talking. I don't know any one more agreeable than the Duchess when one is in good health and spirits, but it really does require a fair amount of both to be with her."—The thought crossed Katharine's mind, as she stood by, waiting to hear what she had to do, that Colonel Forbes had not seen so clearly the Duchess's powers of wearying, when he

had urged Jane to come to Rilworth Castle ; but it seemed severe to blame him for not having quite overcome his natural and long-fostered fault, especially now, when he seemed so really anxious to consult Jane's comfort. "We might drive through the park, and over the hill," he continued ; "it is much higher ground than at Maplestead, and Lowe always said that fresh pure air was the best tonic you could have."—"I should like it very much, very much indeed," said Jane, putting up her face for him to kiss ; "I don't quite think you know how much ; but I could not bear to stand in the way if you wanted to ride, so please not to think of me ; and remember, Katharine will take excellent care of me."—"I think your mistress does look stronger and better this morning, don't you, Miss Ashton?" said Colonel Forbes, turning to Katharine.—Katharine hesitated a little. She did not see any difference herself, and she knew that Jane had slept badly in consequence of the unusual fatigue of seeing so many people. Colonel Forbes was fretted, because she did not immediately assent, and said, rather in his old tone, that it was never well to make the worst of things when people were not strong : there was nothing they required so much as cheerfulness.—"It is my fault," remarked Jane, in a tone of apology ; "if Katharine does not think me very brilliant this morning, for I have been foolishly complaining of fatigue whilst she was dressing me ; but I shall forget every thing, dear Philip, in the pleasure of a drive with you."—Colonel Forbes walked to the window ; his brow was overcast ; he had not been thoroughly comfortable ever since he had insisted upon this visit, and now Katharine and Jane both seemed determined to make him feel that he had done an unwise thing.—"I can't say what I shall do," he remarked, perversely. "Perhaps I may be wanted for the riding-party ; the Duchess won't like her daughters to go unless there is some one she can trust with them."—"Oh ! no, of course ; I quite forgot that. Certainly, Philip, you must go." Neither Jane's face nor accent betrayed any thing like annoyance, except to Katharine's eye. She could see a grave shadow flit across it, chased away by the unselfish smile, which in a moment could throw itself into another's wishes.—Colonel Forbes walked moodily to the door, not approaching Jane again, and, turning his head in another direction : "I can't decide any thing yet," he said, as he went out of the room ; "you had better have your breakfast, Jane." Jane was not inclined for her breakfast then ; her husband was vexed with her causelessly, and the weight of former days settled itself upon her heart, in spite of all Katharine's efforts to interest her.

Colonel Forbes did not appear again, and Jane, anxious to learn what he would do, at last sent Katharine to inquire. Barnes, the only person likely to have heard, could tell nothing; there had been great consultations, but none of the gentlemen seemed to know their own minds. All he had heard was, that his master had said he had letters to write, and probably should not be able to go anywhere. This augured ill for his good temper, as Katharine knew by experience. Having letters to write always meant that he was not in a mood for any company but his own. "Here they come," said Barnes, moving away from the foot of the staircase, where he and Katharine had met; "perhaps you can ask him about it yourself." Colonel Forbes and Lord Marchmont crossed the hall from the library. Katharine heard Colonel Forbes say decidedly, "If I am not wanted, I would much prefer staying at home;" to which Lord Marchmont replied, carelessly, that he hoped Colonel Forbes would consult his own pleasure. This seemed conclusive; and she hurried back to Jane to beg her to prepare for going out before luncheon, as the afternoons and evenings were still very cold.

A knock at the door:—the good-natured Duchess was come to see how Mrs. Forbes was, and to recommend her a special remedy against wakefulness; but especially to enjoy a little London gossip. The enjoyment, however, consisted in talking all the time herself, for Jane knew little really of London life, and did not like talking of it. She made, however, an excellent listener, and the Duchess was quite satisfied, and went on and on in the most interminable way, heaping anecdote upon anecdote, and pouring forth a flood of reminiscences upon Jane, which it required much greater strength, both of body and mind, than she possessed, to endure. Katharine heard something, and guessed more, as she went in and out of the room; and if she had not heard, but only seen, she would have been quite sure, from Jane's face, that all this was a great deal too much for her. But it was impossible to give a hint to a Duchess in her own house, especially when she was so very good-natured, and every now and then said, "Now, my dear, I am not tiring you—you are sure I am not tiring you? you must tell me if I am; only if you had but seen Mr. So-and-so——" and then followed an anecdote, of course. Katharine's only hope was in Colonel Forbes. He would certainly come and inquire after Jane soon, and offer to take her out for a drive, and then the Duchess must depart. But Colonel Forbes had letters to write; that is, he lounged away his time in the library, turning over the pages of the Quarterly Review, talking desultory politics with

the Duke of Lowther, and bandying compliments and repartees with Lady Marchmont, who was bent upon persuading him to join the riding-party. He did not think of his wife, or, rather, when he thought of her it made him cross; and too much out of humour with himself to make up his mind to please her, he sat in a most uncomfortable mood, not caring for what he was doing then, because not able to resolve upon what was to be done afterwards. He was a colonel in the army and a member of Parliament, but his dignity did not save him from the consequences of human infirmity.

"Well, Forbes, going or not going?" said Lord Marchmont, entering the library with his wife, dressed in her riding-habit, just as the clock struck twelve. Colonel Forbes shrugged his shoulders, and observed that it was bitterly cold, and he thought the fire the pleasantest sight he was likely to see that day. "Absurdity!" exclaimed Lord Marchmont. "One would imagine you were an old man of sixty. Louisa," appealing to his wife, "do tell him how foolish he makes himself."—"I have been trying to persuade him of the fact all the morning," said Lady Marchmont; "but I have quite lost my influence with him. It was different in the days of 'auld lang syne,' when we made our *début* together at the Union Ball at Rilworth. I was vain enough then to flatter myself that Colonel Forbes was my most devoted servant."—"You forget the infirmities of age, Lady Marchmont," replied Colonel Forbes. "The Union Ball was antediluvian."—"What a compliment to me!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont. "Of course I am antediluvian too. I shall say nothing more to you, but leave you to the Duchess; and don't flatter yourself that we shall not be a very merry party without you." She said this very good-humouredly, and Colonel Forbes felt a little shaken in his determination to sit by the fire all day. He asked whether every one was ready. "Ready, or nearly ready, or ought to be ready," said Lady Marchmont; "but you must not judge of others by me, for I am a very pattern of punctuality. I have been trained into it ever since I married. Do you know," she added, addressing her husband, "that if we don't go at once we shall create great ill-will and confusion in the establishment. My maid tells me that they are to make a party to go over the house when we are gone, and exhibit its wonders to all the strangers. Colonel Forbes, they won't at all fancy being excluded from the library." Colonel Forbes stood up, and Lady Marchmont laughed, and declared she had gained the victory; but he was still irresolute. At that instant the Duchess appeared at the door. Checking his irritable

feelings, he appealed laughingly to her: "Your Grace is come just in time to prevent my having violent hands laid upon me. Lady Marchmont is almost threatening to carry me off by main force, and take me as a prisoner with the riding-party. She will accept no excuses on the score of age."—"Of course not," said the Duchess, "for your age involves hers; we all grow old together. But, whatever you intend to do, I must beg you all to decide quickly. I have been offering your poor little wife, Colonel Forbes, to drive with me before luncheon, and she has been making a hundred pretty excuses on the score of dutiful obedience to you, and now I find you are going to run away from her." A most unpleasant pang of self-reproach was felt by Colonel Forbes; he bowed, and smiled, and hesitated, and said he should be very sorry to interfere with any of her Grace's plans, and then asked whether Mrs. Forbes seemed inclined for a drive. "Why, really I can't say," was the reply. "I am afraid I may have tired her a little; but she is so vastly agreeable, I could not possibly get away from her. We have been talking for the last hour and a half." A smile passed over Lady Marchmont's face, the meaning of which Colonel Forbes quite understood. "I had better decide upon not going," he said, turning rather abruptly to Lord Marchmont. "If her Grace will excuse me, I think I had better keep to my first engagement with Mrs. Forbes, and drive her a short distance. She is rather nervous, and does not like trusting herself with any one but myself."—"That means, that you doubt my charioteering powers," observed the Duchess, laughing; "but I forgive you. It is not the first time they have been called in question. Besides," she added, with a pleasant tone of cordial kindness, "I can entirely sympathise with the wish to keep your engagement; you will find no companion more charming."—"Well, then, we may reckon upon you in a quarter of an hour from this time," said Lady Marchmont, returning again to the charge.—"You shall not reckon upon him for any thing, Louisa," observed the Duchess; "I will not have any one tormented in my house. He shall go upstairs and talk to his little wife, and do exactly what he pleases. Now, is not that amiable?" she added laughing, as she appealed to Colonel Forbes.—"Most kind, as your Grace always is," was the reply. "I think perhaps it would be better just to see what Jane wishes." He was not sorry to escape from the room, for his perverseness was becoming rather too much for his self-command; and when the Duchess so readily agreed to the propriety of his staying with Jane, his will to join the riding-party became on a sudden uncontrollably strong. The nearest way to Jane's

room was through the Long Gallery; and as he went on in his moody state, not thinking of any thing but himself, he did not hear the voices which might have been heard through the folding-doors leading into the ante-room; and, throwing them open, he came suddenly upon the party of sight-seers, who, tired of waiting for the departure of the riders, had betaken themselves to what was usually considered public property — the Long Gallery. They were looking at the pictures which Barnes was explaining and commenting upon. Katharine was not there. Colonel Forbes drew back, and the noise at the door made Barnes look round; he went up to his master to excuse himself for what would have seemed an impertinence, but that it was a common practice of the house. Colonel Forbes never vented small humours on his servants, and he was very gracious to Barnes, and pleased that he should find amusement; he even went so far as to inquire why Miss Ashton was not there. "Miss Ashton wished to come, sir, but she did not like to leave my mistress. I think she was reading to her." — "You should have made her come," was Colonel Forbes' reply, "she will not have as good an opportunity again." — "I told her so, sir, but she would not hear of it. She said Mrs. Forbes was tired, and that she would rather not." — "Oh! very well," and Colonel Forbes retreated, and the party in the Long Gallery continued their tour of inspection. It was a very little trifle, — nothing but Katharine's duty; she was engaged to attend upon Jane, and of course her own pleasures were not to be put in competition with her mistress's comfort; yet a feeling of self-reproach touched Colonel Forbes' heart. This was not the only instance of the putting aside of personal inclinations for the duty of making others happy. It was always so; whether the questions were great or small, Katharine Ashton's determination was always on the side of unselfishness. Yet Colonel Forbes was not then softened by the example. It was too petty for him, and he was too proud to profit by it. Katharine might have taught him to make great sacrifices; but it required deeper, firmer, principles to induce him to use the effort required for small ones.

He knocked at Jane's door hastily, begged pardon rather pettishly, when he saw Katharine sitting by her, and said he did not intend to interrupt them. — "Interrupt, dear Philip?" said Jane, her face brightening, "Oh! no, how could that be possible? Are you come to say good-bye before you set off for your ride." — "I came to see how you were," he replied. — "Oh! very tolerably well, I assure you. I shall be quite well after a little rest. I have had the Duchess here," she added, smiling. — "Yes, I know

that ; you should not have allowed her to tire you."—"Oh ! that is all nothing ; and you know I could not possibly send her away. But tell me who are going ? What a charming day you will have !" — "Every one in the house seems going except the Duchess," said Colonel Forbes ; and, after a momentary pause, he added, "she talked about driving you out, Jane."—"Yes, but I rather got out of it," said Jane, laughing. "It is very well in a room ; but really the effort of listening in a carriage, and losing half she says—for her voice is despairingly low,—is rather more than I feel equal to."—"And you told her I was going to drive you," he said.—"I told her I had agreed to go with you, if I did drive at all," replied Jane ; "which was quite true ; but that was merely a civil excuse. Don't look grave about it, dear Philip, and think you must stay at home and take care of me merely because of that."

It did seem rather a stupid thing to do, at least at that moment Colonel Forbes thought so. Just then something made him look round for Katharine. She had left the room, as she almost always did when he came in. Jane watched the direction of his glance, and interpreted it. "You know I shall not be alone," she said ; "Katharine will be with me. She has been reading to me for the last quarter of an hour, and she will go on as long as I like. Oh ! dear, how I shall miss her !" Colonel Forbes did not respond, and Jane continued :—"By-the-by, I want her to see the house. Can't Barnes take her over ?"—"Barnes is going over it now," said Colonel Forbes, shortly.—"Now ? how very provoking ! and not to let Katharine know ! Really he ought to be scolded."—"He did let her know," said Colonel Forbes, "but she said she could not come."—"Because of me," said Jane ; "I know that was it. How vexatious ! as if I should have cared about being alone for an hour, if it was to give her pleasure ; but she always will think of others before herself."—"It is her duty to think of you," was the answer.—"Yes, perhaps so, but there are different ways of doing one's duty ; and besides, you know, Philip, we can never look upon Katharine as a common person."—"I don't exactly see that," he replied ; "at least whilst she is in your service."—Jane was silent. She could not discuss the point if he did not understand it, and she could see that he was "put out." She returned to the question of the riding-party, thinking that would please him best, and said, "I suppose you are just ready to start ?"—"I don't know ; I never said I was going to start at all."—"Oh ! yes, but you are. It will do you so much good, and I shall like so to hear all you have been doing when you come back.

You will pass, too, by the Maplestead turnpike, and you can leave a note for me there, and tell them to send it up to the house."—"I rather wish that the Maplestead turnpike was going to be passed by both of us," said Colonel Forbes, moodily. "I don't think I can stay here beyond to-morrow, Jane; there are too many people."—"Oh! you will like them after a day or two," said Jane; "especially if you ride with them to-day, and make yourself acquainted with them."—Colonel Forbes felt so extremely like a pettish child. He was most intensely provoked with himself. But there was the old habit of indulged temper, and he said, with some bitterness, "You seem wonderfully anxious to be rid of me, Jane."—Jane looked up at him with tears in her eyes: "Anxious! Oh, Philip, when I have thought of nothing but my drive all the morning!"

It was an unfortunate speech; it grated against his will. He could scarcely after that say he would leave her. A quick knock was heard at the door, followed immediately by "May I come in?" and the Duchess appeared. "My dear Colonel, I beg ten thousand pardons; Jane, my dear, I hope you will forgive me; but, do you know, I must run away with him. They are all ready, and waiting, and they won't think of going without him; and at last I was obliged to say I would try and persuade him to let me drive you instead." Colonel Forbes looked impenetrable, and did not speak. Jane smiled—such an April smile that she was ashamed of it. "You will go, dear Philip, of course?" she said, in the sweetest and most persuasive of tones.—His better feelings were touched. "It is all nonsense," he said; "they don't really care about it. I have a shrewd suspicion that Lady Marchmont has a wager depending upon it."—"Oh, no, I assure you it is all pure love and affection," said the Duchess, laughing; "but I told them it was very hard upon this poor little sick wife of yours."

"The sick wife will be only the more charmed to see her husband when he returns," said Jane, laying her hand fondly on his arm. "Good-bye, dear Philip; now, you are gone."—Still he hesitated. "I will take excellent care of her," said the Duchess; "and it is a delicious morning for a drive." Colonel Forbes' conscience reproached him so painfully, that he withdrew from Jane, and would not say good-bye.—"Oh! and here is your maid come for orders," said the Duchess, as just at that instant Katharine appeared at the door. "Going out directly shall we say?—Yes, directly," she repeated, turning to Katharine.—"And now I must give orders for the pony-carriage. Come, my dear Colonel,—what! still irresolute?"—His eye caught Katharine's. She meant nothing

—she scarcely understood what was going on ; but he fancied it reproachful, and it goaded him. “Good-bye, my love. Miss Ashton, wrap your mistress up well, she is going with the Duchess in the open pony-carriage.” He passed Katharine proudly, and went down stairs, thankful that at any sacrifice he had at last decided.

CHAPTER LXXI.

JANE drove with the Duchess in the pony-carriage ; came in less tired than she had expected, and went down to luncheon without resting, because it seemed uncourteous to remain above when the party was so small. There was talking all the time, for the Duchess of Lowther was seldom known to be silent. Katharine found her after luncheon lying on the sofa, exhausted in body and depressed in spirits. She did not know why this should be, she said ; it was probably only because of the fatigue. She was not subject to fits of melancholy, and there certainly was no particular cause for the feeling now. Katharine knew herself very well what was the matter. Jane was disappointed ; not of the drive, that was a mere trifle, not to be thought of another time ; but the circumstances of the morning had been so like those of former days, they had brought back all her old feelings. Katharine herself was surprised ; she had not yet realised how long it must take to cure the indulged fault of years, and she had given Colonel Forbes credit for stronger feelings of regret for the past than he had really felt. She might have been more merciful in her judgment if she had read the secret working of his mind ; but we see only the faults of our fellow-creatures, we know little or nothing of the struggles against them. And Colonel Forbes had not yielded without pain ; he had not acted as he would have done some months before, following his own inclination without even a thought of what others might feel. Selfish he was still, but his selfishness was a reproach to him. Even the very irritation of feeling which had at last led him to do exactly what he knew Katharine, in his place, would not have done, was a homage to her higher principles. His esteem was now so deep, that he could not be unmindful of her opinion ; but his pride was also so great that he would not allow to himself that he was influenced by her. The flinty heart had been struck ; but it required a softer, more tender influence, to bid the healing waters flow. Katharine had

made him admire unselfishness ; but it was only Jane who could teach him to love it.

It was nearly six o'clock. The evening was becoming chilly, and Jane drew her seat nearer to the fire, and enjoyed the quietness of the twilight. Katharine was gone down stairs to tea. The riders were expected to return every moment. Jane listened for them occasionally, but her room looked out upon the flower-garden, and she could only catch indistinctly the sounds in the front of the house. It was a time for softening thoughts, and Jane's memory travelled back through the course of her life, and read, as in the pages of a living book, the steps by which she had reached her present resting-place. Her life had not been happy, but it had been very good for her ; a less severe discipline must have failed to work the merciful end which He who loved her had marked out for her. She did not dare to wish one trial altered, to think it better that there should have been one pang less. For herself all had been mercy, and for her husband surely it must be the same. She tried to think that it would be so ; that in some way or other the events which were ordered would do their work for him, as she could not but feel they had done for her ; and, in the sure confidence of child-like faith, she laid her cares to rest, and reposed upon that untiring, infinite Love, which had become the unfading solace of her existence.

Katharine came to the door to ask how she was, and whether any thing could be done for her, and if she would like to dress for dinner, or wait till Colonel Forbes returned. Jane was too comfortable, she said, to move ; she would like to wait a little longer. Perhaps Katharine would come again in ten minutes' time. Katharine went away, and Jane returned to her quiet reverie. The ten minutes had passed, a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes ; Jane looked at her watch by the light of the fire, and thought that Katharine must have mistaken the time. She touched the bell and listened to hear if it rang. It was not easy to tell, for other distant sounds caught Jane's ear—voices and the trampling of horses ; of course, the riding-party returned. She stirred the fire, drew a chair near the sofa, and arranged the few books on the table, that the room might have a cheerful aspect when Colonel Forbes came in, cold and tired as he would probably be. She was glad now that she had not begun to dress, there would be quite sufficient time to have a little talk with him before dinner, if he would only come at once. Still, delay and great stillness ! That was strange, when such a large merry party had just come in, and many of them occupied apartments close to hers. But

there was a footstep on the stairs—a man's footstep; it was heavy, like Colonel Forbes'. No; she was disappointed, it must have been Lord Marchmont. His dressing-room was at the other end of the gallery. Jane felt impatient and reproached herself. Why should she expect Philip to come to her at once? Probably they were all in the library telling the Duchess what they had seen and done. She heard the trampling of the horses as they were led round to the stables, and supposed that the dressing-bell would ring immediately. That was very provoking, it would prevent her seeing any thing of Philip before dinner, and afterwards there would be politics and music, and then she would go to bed too tired to talk. But Jane would not even then be impatient. She rang the bell quite gently, and before she thought it could have been heard, there was a gentle tap at the door, followed by the entrance of the Duchess of Lowther.

She came up to Jane without speaking, and stood with her face hidden from the light of the fire, which, in these moments of delay, had sunk from a brilliant blaze into a dull red. Then she said, in a voice full of agitation, but which she was evidently trying to keep in the tone of indifference, "The riding-party have returned."

It was marvellous to Jane afterwards, how the light flashed upon her in that one moment. She was not agitated like the Duchess; but she rose and stood by her, and said, without the smallest faltering in her voice, "You need not be afraid to tell me; something has happened to Philip."—"The Duchess burst into tears: "An accident, nothing more; pray don't be frightened; don't think it worse than it is." And the Duchess sat down on the sofa and sobbed hysterically.—"If you will tell me where he is, I will go to him," said Jane; but the Duchess only shook her head, and uttered indistinctly: "Not here, not here, at Maplestead."—"Then I will go to Maplestead," was Jane's reply.—"Yes, yes, your maid said she knew you would; she will be here directly. Dear Jane, I thought I could have done better; but indeed it may not be so bad, there is no limb broken." Jane rested against the wall, trembling violently, but she was silent.

When Katharine knocked, it was the Duchess who told her she might enter. Jane was cold as a marble statue. Katharine went up to her, and gently forcing her to sit down, said, "The carriage is ordered, ma'am; it will be here directly." Jane caught her hand, her lips framed a word, but her voice could not utter it.—"Tell her about it, Miss Ashton," said the Duchess; "I could not."—"The horse plunged and threw him, and when they took

him up he was insensible; that is all we know," said Katharine. "All," she repeated again. "It happened near Maplestead, and they have taken him there. Jane's hand shook violently, but she did not shed a tear. The Duchess was frightened, and, calling Katharine to her, whispered, "Had we not better send for a medical man?"—"There will be one at Maplestead. If your Grace will be good enough to give orders that the carriage should be brought round, I think that will be the best thing," said Katharine. She went back to Jane, and said, in the same very quiet way, "I will bring your things, ma'am, if you will put them on;" and then, placing Jane's shawl and bonnet by her side, she left her to help herself, even more than usual, whilst she busied herself with packing. The Duchess seemed perfectly bewildered. Unable to leave Jane, unable to help her, she could only say to herself, "Poor little thing! poor child! If she could only cry!" And then aloud to Jane, "Now, my love, let me put your shawl on, you will very soon be there. I dare say he will be in sense then. He was only stunned, there was no limb broken." Consolation, which Jane might have heard, but to which it seemed she had no power to reply.

They went down stairs; the Duke was in the hall, no one else. Lord Marchmont had gone to Maplestead. It was impossible to speak words of comfort; to say any thing indeed but good-bye only. Katharine had placed Jane in the carriage, and was about to enter it herself when the poor Duchess called her back, and said, in a voice scarcely intelligible from broken sobs, "Miss Ashton, you will let me know yourself how she is. Poor little thing! You will be sure to write to me. I would rather hear from you than any one."

They reached Maplestead. Jane had not spoken a word during the long twelve miles' drive. She would not even lean back in the carriage; but, sitting upright, gazed fixedly on the trees, and hedges, and fields, as they seemed to flee from them in the twilight. Lord Marchmont came to the hall-door, and she took his arm, and went upstairs mechanically. Katharine followed. Lord Marchmont left them at the door of Colonel Forbes' room. Jane opened it herself and went in. The curtain was drawn around the bed, and she pushed it aside with a slow determination which was fearful in its self-command. She gazed upon her husband, but there was no eye to notice her; she touched his hand, but it was deadly cold; at last she murmured 'Philip,' and the soft sound of her own voice, as it seemed to echo through the silent room, touched the over-strained chord of feeling, and sinking on her knees, she hid her face by the bedside, and wept in anguish.

Katharine was comforted then, and left her. Mr. Fowler was in the adjoining room, and she went to speak to him. He said it was a critical case. He would not go so far as to call it one of great danger, but he recommended further advice. The injury was very complicated, principally on the head; it was worse than a broken limb. He did not think, however, that there was any fear of the brain, which was what Katharine most dreaded, and he thought that Colonel Forbes might be restored to sense before many hours were past. Even then Katharine was struck with Mr. Fowler's manner. His great anxiety was for Jane. He begged that she might not be allowed to sit up, or exert herself. He reminded Katharine again and again, that she was to speak of every thing cheerfully, and that she was not to repeat all he might say to her; and when, in the midst of the conversation, Jane herself came in, his manner was almost painful to Katharine, there was so much more hope in it than she could think him justified in giving, knowing as he did the peril of the case.

Jane was as anxious now as she had been apparently stony before, but still all was done and said with great outward composure of manner. She made Mr. Fowler give every direction to herself, and even suggested things which might be necessary. It was as if she had cast off all the shrinking timidity and nervousness of her character, and her spirit had suddenly risen to new energy in the consciousness of a great emergency. Katharine asked her if she was tired, and she said, yes, she thought she was; but she did not sit down, except for a few minutes, for nearly an hour. At the end of that time she consented to have a sofa moved near the bed, and lay down upon it; but she did not close her eyes, and watched every restless movement of her husband, and started up at every sound, in a way which gave little hope of her obtaining any rest through the night. Katharine was obliged to yield to all this—it was Mr. Fowler's advice. Opposition, he said, would be worse for her than any other excitement; but he promised to give her a sleeping draught, which might procure her some hours' rest, and by that time, his own opinion was that Colonel Forbes would be restored to sense.

Katharine did not know what she had gone through herself, till about twelve o'clock at night, when Jane having consented to sleep in the dressing-room, and Barnes being placed as a watcher by Colonel Forbes, she found herself at liberty to retire to her own room, and began to write a hasty note to Charles. The effects of fatigue and fear then were painfully felt. Her hand shook so that she could scarcely hold her pen, and it seemed at

first impossible to collect her thoughts, so as to frame a connected sentence; but the consciousness of perfect sympathy, and the thought of his love, were unspeakably resting; and at last wearied out in body, yet soothed in mind, she fell into a disturbed sleep.

CHAPTER LXXII.

MAPLESTEAD was strangely unnatural the next morning. Lord Marchmont breakfasted alone in the library, preparatory to his return to the Castle. Mr. Fowler waited in Colonel Forbes' bedroom for the arrival of a surgeon from the county town. Jane, the first agony of excitement over, lay almost as helpless as her husband in the dressing-room; and Katharine, still thinking first of her, endeavoured to soothe the eager fears with which she listened to every sound, by reading to her the morning Psalms.

Mr. Fowler was mistaken. Colonel Forbes did not recover his consciousness in a few hours. The injury seemed worse than had at first been anticipated; fever was coming on, and in the few words he uttered there were signs of delirium. An attempt was made to keep all this from Jane, but she was not to be deceived, and Katharine thought it would be better not to try to deceive her. Whatever she had to say herself she said openly. She told her that the symptoms were not so good; that Mr. Fowler was very anxious, but not in any way hopeless; and Jane's mind rested upon every word which Katharine spoke with that perfect conviction of truth which alone can give repose. She was very winning and touching in her grief; so thoughtful, and gentle, and obedient,—yet so unutterably wretched. Katharine read truly all that was in her mind,—the agonising suspense, the intensity of her inward entreaty that her husband might not be taken from her suddenly, without preparation. It could not be spoken of—that overwhelming thought of awe; but the hours were passed in stillness and prayer by his bedside; and Jane would often sit with Katharine's hand in hers, tears coursing each other down her cheeks, and her eager eyes fixed upon the face so dear to her, as if striving to read by the prophetic power of her deep love the fate that was reserved for them both.

Strange it might have seemed that one already so purified by suffering should be called upon to endure such bitter grief. But who may venture to judge what shall be needed for the work of educating the soul for Heaven, before that work is accomplished?

So passed the morning hours ; in the afternoon the new surgeon arrived, and fresh remedies were adopted ; in the evening, as Jane stood bending over her husband, he looked up at her with a faint smile, and whispered her name. That was a moment of exquisite happiness—almost it repaid her for the long hours of agony which had gone before. Yet it was not to last. There was a fear of relapse—a dread of some internal injury not yet discovered—and again Jane's spirit sank, not as it had done before (for he knew her, and could speak to her), but yet with anticipations of evil which she could not conquer.

Moments in a sick room pass very slowly, and days are weeks to the watchers by a bed of suffering. A dreary calmness brooded over Maplestead—not so much the quietness after a tempest which has past as the dulness of dread, lest another may be gathering. Three days after the accident the household had fallen into the habits natural to anxiety and nursing. There were those who waited by day, and those who sat up at night ; and by these duties all others were regulated. Silence fell like the shadow of death upon the empty chambers, the deserted passages ; laughter sank into a smile ; words of welcome were exchanged for looks of anxious inquiry ; and rumour, busy with the events of which it caught only the distant sound, already occupied itself with thoughts of the future.

Candidates for the anticipated vacant seat in Parliament were suggested by significant glances and circuitous modes of speech. Votes were reckoned in private, and vague propositions made with the idea of sounding the minds of certain influential persons. Outwardly, all was decorous sympathy ; but grave looks and altered tones showed clearly that the people of Rilworth believed that Colonel Forbes would die.

Did he think so himself ? Did the echo of that solemn undertone, the ground-swell of death, reach to his sick chamber ? Such seasons are not always those of clear perception. The body holds the mastery over the soul, and thought and feeling are too often devoted wholly to its service. Colonel Forbes thought of little but his own suffering at first. He was in great pain, and he was not used to it. It seemed a hardship, and it surprised him. But he never imagined that it would not be subdued in time ; he did not even realise the fact that he had ever been in danger. But the sharp pain did not subside, and still there were grave faces around his bed, and long and anxious consultations ; and at last—it was a week after the accident—Jane stood by his bedside, and told him that she had a favour to ask—a great favour—he must

not deny her ; she wished that Doctor Lowe should be sent for. He looked at her in wonder. "Lowe, my dear ! you are laughing at me. What good can Lowe do me ?"—"None, perhaps," said Jane, sadly, "except be a comfort to me."—"But, my love, I must not have you fanciful. You must not be over anxious about me, Jane," and he gazed at her kindly and sorrowfully.—"Mr. Fowler would be more satisfied," said Jane.—"Fowler is a fool !" he exclaimed, in his old impatient way ; but he was sorry that he had spoken so when he saw how Jane's countenance changed, and he smiled and called her his foolish, little, anxious wife.—"Then we may send for Dr. Lowe," said Jane, timidly.—"Send for any doctor you please, my love, but don't flatter yourself that he or any one else will do me any good. Time is the only thing. If I could but get up my appetite, and sleep better, and be rid of this terrible, dull aching at my side, I should be quite myself."—"Yes," said Jane ; "but, dear Philip, you would not object to see Dr. Lowe if it made me happier ?"—"I don't object to any thing, my love ; but I don't like you to wear yourself out with fancies. You look like a ghost as it is. Why don't you lie down ?"—"I cannot rest, Philip ; I would rather sit by you."—"Not rest, you foolish child ? What is there to prevent your resting ? There are plenty to do any thing I may require."—"But I would rather do it all myself, dear Philip, if I might." He tried to turn in the bed to look at her, but weakness and pain were too much for him, and he groaned in suffering. Jane went round to the other side, and endeavoured to ease him by raising the pillows ; he scarcely thanked her, but he did not like her to go away, and she stood by him in silence. Presently something seemed to cross his mind as to what had been said, and he asked again, "What made you think, Jane, of sending for Lowe ?"—"It was not my thought," said Jane, gently.—"Oh ! then it was Miss Ashton's. Sensible woman as she is, I wonder she does not know better than to indulge in fancies."—"No, it was not Katharine," replied Jane ; "it was Mr. Fowler. I thought I said so." Colonel Forbes did not reply ; his face was turned aside, and she could not see its expression. He did not move again, but seemed likely to sleep, yet the ringing of the hall-door bell roused him, and he said, "If that is Fowler, I wish to see him alone." Jane left him, and went to the head of the stairs. Katharine met her there, and asked how Colonel Forbes was. "Much the same, perhaps in rather more pain." It seemed as if all her energy had suddenly forsaken her, and she sat down on the upper step of the staircase and cried bitterly.—"He will allow Dr. Lowe to be sent for, I hope, ma'am ?" said Katharine.—"Yes, he says so now ; but

he may change again. Oh, Katharine, he thinks so lightly about it all!" This was the root of her grief, and Katharine could not comfort it.—"I will go down and speak to Mr. Fowler," she said, trying to divert Jane's thoughts; "and I will tell you, ma'am, before he goes." And as Mr. Fowler was heard coming up the stairs, Jane rose up suddenly, and rushed away.

It was not a long conference between Colonel Forbes and Mr. Fowler; when it was ended, Mr. Fowler sat down in the library to write to Dr. Lowe. Strict orders were given for perfect stillness; it was thought that Colonel Forbes would sleep.

And he did sleep for a few moments—nature was worn out by pain; but it was only a short repose; he woke to toss his head restlessly from side to side, and moan in the extremity of his suffering, and then try to sleep again, and all the time to have before him a horrible phantom—yet not a phantom, a reality—a presence of danger from which he could not escape—a fear which could not be soothed—an anguish for which he could find no opiate.

He was a brave man—physically brave; he would have faced death in the battle-field, and called it glory; but to know that it might be stealing upon him unperceived; to be called to meet his enemy calmly and deliberately, with memory busied in the past, and conscience goading him to gaze upon the future,—that was a trial for which no mortal strength could suffice.

He had asked the question, and it had been answered unflinchingly as it was put; for who would have thought of hiding the truth from a man strong in mental power like Colonel Forbes? The internal injury had not yet been reached; if this were not soon done, a few days, Mr. Fowler believed, would probably put it beyond the reach of human skill. That was the thought which Colonel Forbes carried with him to his dreams, and brought back with him to his waking hours. He did not speak of it; he did not speak, indeed, of any thing for the remainder of that day, except what might concern his illness. Jane thought him drowsy, and he allowed her to believe it; or if he moaned in the anguish of his heart, she fancied that the pain he endured was becoming more unbearable.

She might have been happier if she had known the truth; any suffering would, in her eyes, have been better than the insensibility which she believed had stolen over his heart, and from which she did not dare, in his present state, to rouse him.

That was a very long day, for Dr. Lowe could scarcely arrive till the evening. Katharine had sat up the previous night, and

was obliged to take some rest, as it was possible her services might be required again till very late.

About four o'clock she went into Colonel Forbes' room, and found him lying in the same apparently torpid state, and Jane half-sitting, half-reclining, in an arm-chair placed by the bedside; a servant was in the dressing-room, so that every thing could be procured that might be wanted; and Katharine, feeling that her own strength and spirits must be recruited, if she hoped to be of any use, asked if she could be spared to take a few turns in the park. Jane smiled an assent, and begged that she would stay as long as she possibly could,—nothing would be wanted till Dr. Lowe came. There was such a ghastly attempt at cheerfulness in her manner as she said this, that Katharine could scarcely summon courage to leave her; but Jane insisted upon it strongly, and Katharine went out.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE evening was very mild, warm as April, though the season was only the beginning of March. Katharine walked towards Moorlands, it was her natural direction whenever she was alone. The thoughts which it awoke were often mournful, but they were more interesting to her than any others. She went on slowly this evening, thinking less perhaps of herself and those immediately belonging to her, than usual. The suspense of life or death, in whatever form it may present itself, for the time absorbs into itself all other interests. That last week had been like a horrible dream, from which Katharine had not yet awakened. All was changed, even Jane herself; she was living a life most strange for her, a life which Katharine would, a short time before, have thought must be fatal to her; yet she was bearing up against it, and never allowed that her strength was giving way. If she neither ate nor slept (and Katharine knew that it was seldom she could do either), the excessive fatigue seemed to have little or no effect upon her. And she was in general, too, very calm, though once or twice Katharine had detected symptoms of nervousness, which without great self-command would have seemed likely to be uncontrollable. Could all this last? and if it did not, what would be the reaction? Katharine trembled to think; she tried resolutely to turn from all fear and trust; but that was not so easily done, for still unbidden, the thought came again and again,

stealthily creeping into her mind in every form, till they had carried her far into days which she might never live herself to see, but in which she had traced the course of the children, orphans as it seemed probable they might soon be ; and mourned for sorrow, the very beginning of which might still, in the Mercy of God, be spared them.

Katharine was conscious then how little such thoughts could profit her, and raising her eyes to give herself new impressions she saw standing directly before her,—Charles Ronaldson. Her exclamation of intense delight jarred upon her own ears, it seemed unfeeling ; but it was the sweetest music to him ; and as he drew her arm within his, he said, “I had thought of writing, but I should have lost great happiness, the happiness of contrast. Katharine, it seems now that I would not for worlds have been spared those years of trial, if with them I must have lost also the blessedness of feeling that all is now so different.”—“So very, very different !” repeated Katharine ; “it almost seems wrong to feel how light every trouble is when you are near.”—“But you have had great trouble,” he said, “that made me so anxious to come. I knew I might be here to-day, and remain till the day after to-morrow, but I would not tell you for fear of disappointment. You are looking terribly worn, dearest.”—“Every one is that now at Maplestead,” said Katharine ; “but no one thinks of it, dear Charles ; it has been, and is, a terrible time.”—“Is ? but Colonel Forbes is surely out of danger?”—“He is in sense,” said Katharine ; “but no one can say more. Mr. Fowler thinks badly of him.”—“And Mrs. Forbes ?”—“I don’t know how she is, I could never describe it, it is wonderful ; but it cannot last.”

He turned round to her quickly ; “Katharine, I am fearfully selfish, but I must ask,—you will not let all this make a difference ?” She did not instantly answer, for her heart beat very quickly, and her voice seemed to have failed her. He stopped suddenly, and was about to repeat the question, but she interrupted him : “Charles, I have promised, and my first duty is now to you. You will trust me ?”—“Implicitly as I would trust the word of an angel. God forgive me, if my fear was wrong.” He walked on silently, it seemed as if his conscience was reproaching him. They sat down under the branches of a spreading oak, still, however, leafless. The unusual warmth of the evening seemed oppressive to him, and he took off his hat and laid it down beside him. Katharine took it up. “I will rule for once,” she said ; “you shall not take cold.” He smiled, and answered, “You shall rule for always, if you will ; I can have no jealousy

of your authority.”—“I would not trust you,” replied Katharine ; “I am not your wife yet.”—“And you think I shall change ?” he said.—“No indeed, indeed, I think only that you will one day become accustomed to me, and see me as I am.—Oh ! Charles ;” and she sighed, “that is the fear which would frighten me, if any thing could, when I think of you.”—“It may be a mutual fear,” he said, gravely ; “but Katharine,” and his voice grew more cheerful, “we have known each other long enough.”—“Yes, but still,—don’t think I am speaking or thinking of ourselves—I could not, it would be impossible to be afraid ; but when one sees what may be the end of deep love, how it may all melt away, it does frighten one.”—“There must have been a fault at the beginning in those cases,” he replied.—“Not always,” said Katharine, thoughtfully.—“We can never tell,” he replied ; “people are punished for faults of ignorance, as well as for those which are wilful. Perhaps in questions of marriage, ignorance is in a measure wilful ; we will not see what we do not like to see, and yet we may be sure that the faults which are exhibited to others before marriage, will be exhibited to ourselves afterwards.”—“Constant little faults would weary my love, I am afraid,” said Katharine ; “daily selfishness for instance. I could much better bear many greater failings.”—Charles laughed. “Thank you, I shall know now what I have to expect.”—“I don’t think you have any faults,” said Katharine, simply ; “that is,” she added, as she saw him look grave, “I can’t see them.”—“Take them upon faith, dearest,” he answered ; “it will be happier for us both. But tell me more about Maplestead. Is Mrs. Forbes so very miserably anxious ?” —“The grief has passed beyond my sympathy now,” said Katharine ; “we never speak of it. And I am allowed to do very little. That frets me, sometimes, I seem suddenly to have become nothing.”—“Then you will have more time to spare for me,” he said ; “but, Katharine, she will surely break down suddenly.”—“That is my fear,” she replied ; “but I must not talk about it, Charles, it unfits me for what I have to do ; and though I say that I am allowed to do nothing, I know that really it is of consequence that I should be able to keep up, if it is only to prevent other people from blundering.”—“And Mrs. Forbes then does nothing but attend to her husband ?” said Charles.—“I do not think she has a thought for any thing else,” replied Katharine ; “though I have known her so long and so intimately, I never understood till now what her feeling for him is. I am sure he himself has never comprehended it in the least. He would have been a different man if he had done so.”—“He may have compre-

hended it," said Charles, "without returning it."—"No," replied Katharine; "I do not think that is possible. I do not believe we can comprehend any thing in feeling except from our own feeling."—"That means that Colonel Forbes is selfish, and does not understand unselfishness," said Charles; "you are very cautious, Katharine, but the world has known that long ago." Katharine sighed. "I do not quite approve of your doctrine, though," he continued; "I could never say that my love was not selfish, and yet, indeed, I trust I can understand yours."—"Your love is not selfish," said Katharine; "if it had been I should not be where I am,—at Maplestead. Oh! Charles, if it had been otherwise—I may say it; may I not, now? I could not have loved you." He paused for a moment, and then in a low voice said, "That frightens me; I may have deceived you."—"No," exclaimed Katharine, eagerly, "impossible; with the experience of such long years, impossible. It is the realisation of the dream which I have had from childhood;" she continued. "From the first moment, that is, when I could think what love might be. It has been such a marvel to me; I have seen it so unlike, so very unlike any thing that I could esteem or desire; and I was told that it could not be different,—that it must always make people forgetful of others, that it must take the place, for the time, even of the highest, most unearthly love; and so I dreaded it. I shrank even from the thought of it, or if I did think, I had my own visions, but they were lonely ones, I had no one to share them with; no one could understand them."—"It may be so still," he said, interrupting her. She smiled brightly, and replied, "I have no fear. We could not love each other if we did not love God first." They stood up to return to the house, for it was late, and the sun was sinking low in the horizon. Charles lingered still, leaning against the tree. "Katharine," he said, "it is very hard to part with this indefinite time before me; harder now than it was months ago."—"It shall not be parting for one moment longer than you yourself shall say is right," she replied; and then, as a blush crimsoned her face, she added, "Have I not said more than even you would venture to ask?" The answer was in action, not in words, but the kiss which he imprinted on her forehead showed that even he was satisfied.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THAT evening Jane knelt by the side of her husband, and prayed, as only those can pray who feel that on the balance of life or death hangs the destiny, not of Time but of Eternity. She might have deceived herself before, but she could do so no longer. The little faults in daily life so constant as scarcely to be regarded; the habitual neglect, the increasing indifference to religion, which had been dawning upon her for years, stood forth now in startling clearness. He, whom with all the clinging tenderness of her nature, she had loved through years of disappointment and indifference, was about, it might be, to pass into the dread presence of his Maker, with the burden of those years still upon his conscience. Oh! for an arm to rouse him while yet there was time—a voice to whisper in his ear, "Prepare to meet thy God."

But he lay silent—suffering; unthinking so it seemed, of all but the physical pain he was enduring; anxious, so it seemed, for nothing but the arrival of a physician who might soothe him with the flattering hope that death was yet far off. Many times he had asked to be told the hour, sent messengers down the avenue to look out for the carriage; at last Katharine herself was stationed at the window to give the earliest notice of Dr. Lowe's arrival. It was the agonising longing for life,—did he think what was involved in it? "There are the carriage wheels,—I hear them," and Jane staggered rather than walked to the window at which Katharine was standing. The carriage turned into the avenue. Jane turned more than pale, her face was death-like. "Go to meet him, Katharine," she said; "take him to the dressing-room, I will follow you;" and then slowly she returned to her husband, and said, "Philip dear, Dr. Lowe is come." He looked his comprehension of her meaning, but he did not express either pleasure or pain; and she sat down again, for she could not stand. There was an intense stillness in the house; the hall-door was far off, and they could not hear the carriage drive up. Colonel Forbes' hand rested on the coverlid; he raised himself up feebly, and laid it upon Jane's head, as she leant it against his pillow. "Jane, my best treasure;" she started, and throwing herself on her knees, caught his hand, and covered it with kisses.—"Pray for me that I may be forgiven," and sinking back again, he closed his eyes, and Jane, as in a voice scarcely audible she repeated the fifty-first Psalm, could not tell even by the motion of his lips, that he was conscious of her words.

Low voices were heard in the adjoining room. Jane said quietly

to her husband, "Will you see Dr. Lowe now?" and he faintly gave assent, and she went in. Katharine was there too. Jane's manner was, what it had ever been, composed almost to coldness, but something in her tone struck Katharine as changed; it was as if she breathed more freely. Dr. Lowe forbade her going back, he wished to be alone with his patient, he said; at least only with the medical man who had been attending him. Jane seated herself, but she did not appear to want support. Her limbs seemed rigid. Katharine stood by her, and neither of them spoke.

Long, long, very long it appeared to Katharine. Jane had no consciousness of time; she was not living in this world. Some one in the inner room twisted the handle of the door, and then went back again. Katharine's knees trembled violently; she leant against the wall. Jane looked up:—"You had better sit down, Katharine, you will be tired;" and Katharine took her place in the window-seat. Again the handle of the door was touched. Mr. Fowler opened it, and asked for paper, and pens, and ink. It was Jane who gave them. Katharine's head was dizzy; she could not see where they were. Once more a step was heard, slow and heavy,—then a pause,—a murmuring consultation. Katharine glanced at Jane, and saw that her hands were clasped together, as if held by bars of iron, but even then there was but the stern compression of the lips, the dark deep line around the fixed eye, to mark the inward agony. And the door opened, and the physician entered. Katharine could not go. She stood behind Jane's chair. Dr. Lowe spoke at once. "My dear Mrs. Forbes, he is very ill, but there is much to hope;" and the rush of Jane's tears was like the torrent of rain which tells that the darkness of the thunder-cloud has passed.

He spoke kindly and soothingly to her, as one who had known her long, and shared her fears with more than ordinary sympathy. He said that the symptoms which had alarmed them were not as dangerous as had been supposed; that the shock Colonel Forbes had received was very great, but that with a naturally strong constitution there was no reason to fear that he would not ultimately rally. But he said also that he would not deceive her by telling her there was no cause to fear; until the pain was entirely subdued, there must be. And Jane covered her face with her hands, and Katharine heard her murmur, "Thy will be done."

Colonel Forbes hovered between life and death; each day saw but little change. The pain, the symptom of danger, was very obstinate; but it did begin to subside at last, and he was able, though very weak, to be moved from his bed to the sofa. Jane nursed him still; he would bear no other attendant; or rather, if

he spoke of bearing it, her altered countenance showed the pain he was giving by the proposal. So they passed hour after hour together. He spoke little, except to ask Jane how she felt, and beg her not to tire herself, but lay quietly thinking. Jane sat by him, and sometimes read to him for a short time, though in a feeble voice, for her breath was short and faint. He seemed to have no choice as to the book. It was always left to Jane to say what it should be; and his thoughts frequently seemed wandering to other things. But she read on still; it was enough for her happiness that the sound of her voice cheered him. Often he gazed upon her fixedly, and there were moments when the dark knitting of the brow which had once betokened his inward agitation, was seen again working almost convulsively. But if she asked what ailed him, it was gone.

Since that one prayer for her prayers, uttered as in the very presence of death, not one word had passed between them on the subject of religion, except that he would, morning and evening, point to the Prayer Book and Bible, and ask her to read to him; and then his voice would be heard in the Confession and the Lord's Prayer, and at the close he would thank her, and bid her kiss him.

Was he penitent? was he grateful? was he hopeful? Who could tell?

They had passed three weeks together in this way. Colonel Forbes was recovering his strength, and was able to walk about his room, and talked of soon going out. Jane always went out a little in the middle of the day, if the weather was fine, but she could walk only a very little distance, and often it happened that she would stop, seized by a sudden tremor—a heart sickness, like the ebbing of the tide of life.

She had been walking one afternoon a little earlier than usual: it was so beautiful that she was tempted out by Katharine, and Colonel Forbes urged her to go also; he always did urge her now, anxiously. He would not let her stay with him, or read to him, or do any thing which might over-fatigue her, if he could help it.

They sat out of doors some little time, upon the terrace, and the children came to them. Jane had seen but little of them lately; they had naturally been kept away from their father's sick-room in the day-time, and only went to him to wish him "good night," and it was a new delight to her to have them about her, and hear their cheerful voices. She talked a good deal about them to Katharine; and said what she had observed of their dis-

positions, what were likely to be their temptations in life, and how it would be well for them to be treated. She was afraid, she said, that her own reserve might stand in the way of gaining their confidence. It was a dread which she had always had, more or less, particularly during the last few months. "Colonel Forbes is reserved too," she added, "and with both parents shut up from them, it will be hard for them." Katharine observed that as the children grew older, and were more her companions, this feeling of reserve might wear off. "Perhaps so." She paused. "If any thing were to happen to me, I should like Miss Forbes to have the care of them. She would be very kind to them, and she would make Philip happy." "If that were possible then," said Katharine. Jane's pallid face flushed a little. "I shrink from the thought of his unhappiness, Katharine; but I should not like him to forget me. I do not think he will," she added, after a moment's thought. Lucy had been walking by Katharine's side unperceived, and, looking up in her mother's face, she said, "Why should papa forget you? He called you an angel last night, to Philip and me." There was a pause.—"Papa calls me that because he loves me, dear child," said Jane; "but there are no angels living on earth." And she walked on silently. "Papa does think her an angel though," said Lucy, lowering her voice, as if only wishing Katharine to hear; "and he cried last night when he said it. I never saw him cry before." Katharine felt Jane's arm press more heavily upon her, and asked her to sit down, but she said no, she would go in-doors: Katharine went with her to the door of her dressing-room, but Jane would not let her remain to assist in taking off her walking things; she said she would go at once to Colonel Forbes; they had been away from him some time. The children followed. Jane made a sign to them to go in very quietly, for she thought he was asleep; but he was not, he had been reading. Jane knelt down by him, and kissed him, and smoothed his hair, and he looked at her fondly, and observed that she had been long away. Her heart was very full, and she said timidly, "Do you miss me?" The strange contraction of the brow was visible, which always frightened her, and she trembled. "If mamma is an angel, papa," said Lucy, "you must miss her."—"Angels live in Heaven, my darling," said Jane, gently but reprovingly; "and you must not stay and talk now; nurse will be waiting for you." Philip jumped upon his father's sofa, and kissed him, and then both went away. Colonel Forbes scarcely noticed them; his eye rested upon Jane. It had a strange eager expression, as if he was gazing upon something unreal. Once more she spoke. The question was wrong from her by the sorrow of years. "Philip, if I were gone, should

you miss me?" A pause—a glance—oh! how vivid in its expression of the soul's bitterness,—and the barriers around the proud heart were broken down, and the cold, haughty, selfish man of the world leant his head upon the shoulder of his gentle wife, and sobbed convulsively.

Miss her! Would to God!—it was the prayer of his spirit's agony—that she might be spared to him, though it were at the sacrifice of all else that was precious to him on earth, so that he might but prove his love and his repentance. Miss her! Would not life be death without her? Would there be hope, or joy, or fear, if the sun of his daily existence was taken from his sight? And almost wildly he clasped her in his arms, as if dreading that even at that hour, the decree which was to separate them had gone forth.

And then the feeling changed, and it was not sorrow, but compunction, remorse, the hidden grief which had been corroding his heart since first he had stood face to face with his past life, and gazed upon that most awful of all sights—a soul, the life of which has been apart from God. He poured it forth with all the fiery impulse of one in whom the pent-up springs of a higher life have by one sudden shock been set free. He told it fully, freely, without self-excuse, or reservation. God had in mercy forced him to look upon his own heart in the presence of death, and there was nothing else worthy of dread.

No, he could not be proud now; least of all in the presence of her whom he loved, and yet had deceived in her dearest hope—the hope that they were united for Eternity. It was peace, even in its humiliation, to trace how the light had dawned upon him—how, insensible to the daily love and goodness to which his eye had become accustomed, he had been first awakened to the contrast between the service of God and the service of self by the simple self-devotion of Katharine Ashton; how then he had thought that he would improve, and strive to correct his faults by the aid of his own reason; and how the deeply-rooted habit, the long-indulged feelings, had been too strong for him, and, mastering him in little things, might well have carried him back again to the downward course which he had so blindly followed, but that a strong Hand had interposed to save him, even at the risk of his earthly life, from the peril of those who forget God. It was a tale of deep repentance, and Jane listened to it, kneeling still by his side, dizzy and bewildered in her thankfulness; her cold hands clasped in his, her head reclining upon his breast; and, at last, whilst still he was speaking, she fainted away.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THERE was a great change in Jane from that evening ; Katharine was the first to perceive it. Happy she was, indeed,—intensely happy ; but the feeling was too great for her. If, by her husband's care, repose had been granted to her years before, it might have given a fresh spring to her life ; now she was too weak for joy, and it crushed her. But so it is : repent though we may, earnestly, bitterly, we cannot undo the past : forgiven though, through God's mercy, we may hope we are, we still must bear the punishment in this world entailed upon transgression.

Colonel Forbes had been told that his wife's existence, humanly speaking, depended upon kindness and care, and he neglected her. Now, when he would have thought wealth, and political prospects, and worldly reputation, all too little to purchase but a single year of life, it was too late. Yet it was difficult for Katharine to realise what she knew was Jane's danger. She was so calm, so quiet, so cheerful ; her voice, though feeble, told of such a spring of inward happiness ! It was not like the decay of consumption. She was very thin, but she had no cough, no hectic flush. Even when she complained of illness, it was only of sudden faintness, sharp throbs of pain, feelings which she could not account for ; and when these were past, the stream of her happiness seemed to flow on again, pure and glad in her husband's presence, as the mountain rill, long hidden amongst rocks, bursts forth for a space, and glitters in the light ere its waters are blended with the ocean. She lived, perhaps, less in her husband's room than before. He was becoming much stronger, and could better attend to himself, and he was very anxious for her to be in the open air ; but the hours which she did spend with him were more really life than the whole course of her previous married existence. She had lost her fear of him, and they talked without reserve, and both perhaps forgot the sword which hung over them in the joy of their newly-found sympathies. Colonel Forbes, indeed, had never thoroughly understood what he could not bear to believe ; and now, when he took such care of her, and was so desirous that his wishes should not interfere with her comfort, and felt so vexed when she seemed to have exerted herself too much, it was not with any definite feeling of fear ; it was only that his treasure was new to him, and therefore he guarded it the more anxiously.

One morning, a Sunday morning, about a month from that time,

Jane rose earlier than was her wont, for she was to go to church with her husband, only for the second time since his illness; not to the whole service, however; it was now some time since she had been equal to that on the Communion Sundays; but she was to join him there after the sermon.

Katharine stayed at home with her. She had been so used to attend upon her, that no one else could well have taken her place. Colonel Forbes, when he left her, remarked that she looked dreadfully ill that morning, and, for a few minutes, he seemed undecided whether to go or stay; but Jane was very earnest with him to go, and assured him that it was merely her usual morning face, only he had not before observed it. He appealed to Katharine, and she too thought that Jane looked very worn, but she changed so rapidly that there might not really be cause to think her worse than usual.

And she did seem to rally when she was dressed, and walked downstairs with a firm, easy step, and even took a few turns on the terrace whilst waiting for the carriage. The fresh air, she said, did her a great deal of good, and the country was looking so particularly lovely, it seemed to give her a new sense of enjoyment.

She talked but little to Katharine, but when she did, her thoughts seemed dwelling very much upon the service, and upon the happiness of joining in it with her husband. This point she referred to more than once, though she could not bring herself to say what was really in her mind, that it would be the first really happy Communion which had been granted her for years. Colonel Forbes met her at the church door, and Jane turned to Katharine, and whispered: "Katharine, you will remember us!" and then she walked up the aisle, leaning on her husband's arm, and he placed her with an anxious and tender care in her seat close to the chancel.

When Katharine looked again, Jane was kneeling at the altar with her husband, as, in by-gone years, she had knelt by his side when plighting him her troth.

The blessing which had then been neglected, was now earnestly sought, and doubtless obtained; and when Katharine herself, kneeling at the same altar, offered the prayer for which Jane had asked, it was blended with a thanksgiving, fervent, it might have seemed, as angels would utter in Heaven over the lost and found.

"Jane, my own treasure, it has been a very happy day."—Colonel Forbes sat by his wife's sofa, which had been drawn in front of the window. The pale yet vivid rays of a glorious moon

were shining into the apartment. "So happy, Philip, it is almost pain!" And she slightly gasped for breath. "Is Katharine there?" "In the bed-room with the children; shall I call them?" He brought them back with him, and Katharine came too, thinking she was wanted. Colonel Forbes made Philip stand by him, and Lucy sat upon a little stool at his feet. Jane drew them towards her, and kissed them fondly. "Look at the moon, darlings," she said; "is it not lovely?" They had scarcely noticed it before, and Lucy jumped up, and they both went to the window. Colonel Forbes knelt on one knee upon the stool which Lucy had left. "Jane, is it wrong to feel peace when life has been so misspent?" She put her arm round him, and said: "When God gives peace, dear Philip, who can take it from us?" "And I will try, He knows it is my wish to try and serve Him," said Colonel Forbes humbly. Jane started up suddenly.—"Are you ill? Are you worse, my darling one? Are you worse?" Jane put her hand to her heart.—"Happiness! but too much." He looked at her uneasily, but the moon passed under a cloud, and he could not see her face. "There is a candle in the next room; bring it, Lucy," he said quickly. Lucy seized her brother's hand, but lingered in the doorway; she was frightened. "Go, both of you," whispered Katharine, "and I will fetch the candle." Jane stretched out her hand to retain them.—"Kiss me, my precious ones! Katharine—Philip! Oh, God! help me."

When the moon broke forth again, it shone upon the face of death.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THERE was sorrow at Maplestead, — deep sorrow; a darkness as of earth when the gladness of sunshine has departed; — a stillness of desolation, as when the whirlwind has rushed by, and we sit alone to gaze upon the ruin that it has made.

No one saw Colonel Forbes for many days; — even his children were denied his presence. He did all that was necessary by writing, not by words.

But on the day of Jane's funeral, he left his room, and saw his friends, and conversed with them calmly; and when he returned home after the service, he called Katharine to him, and talked with her of the plans which he had formed, deliberately, with the

sober, unexcited judgment of a man who has faced the future, and steeled himself, not proudly yet manfully, to bear it without shrinking. His eldest sister, he said, would come to him almost immediately. In the meantime he begged that Katharine would, if possible, remain and take the charge of the children. The request was made with hesitation. He evidently feared to propose any thing which might interfere with her own private arrangements, though he did not plainly allude to them.

Katharine was only anxious to assure him that the children would be her first thought and her first claim, until they were placed under their aunt's care. They were Jane's legacy of affection, and she could not have borne the appearance of neglecting them. She told Colonel Forbes at once that her time would be free for several weeks; and then his mind seemed relieved, and he spoke to her upon other subjects, all connected with Jane, but her name never passed his lips.

It was very touching and grateful to Katharine's feelings to see how he turned to her with the feeling that she could understand him. Little wishes which she scarcely thought he would have endured to realise, even in his own mind, were mentioned to her; and he would even have gone further in his trust than Katharine could see to be right, and would have given her the disposal and arrangement of various questions as to things which had belonged to his wife; but Katharine was under no mistake as to her true position. All that she could do to help, in the way of giving an opinion, or superintending, if necessary, she said she would do, and she did; but the real business was left for Miss Forbes. She was now to be the mistress of Maplestead; and as Katharine had formerly deferred to Jane, so now much more she was anxious to defer to her. As yet Miss Forbes was known to her only by sight, and Katharine could not help feeling uneasy until she had seen more of her — so much of the children's happiness was likely to depend upon her. Report had spoken of her very favourably, but report tells only of the external life, and it is not that which is of importance with children. She was likely to be a great contrast to Jane, and the children would feel this keenly, for their little hearts were very full of grief which they could not understand, and which it required a gentle and loving hand properly to soothe.

But Miss Forbes came, and Katharine was inexpressibly relieved. She was, indeed, unlike Mrs. Forbes in many things; she had not the grace of manner which had given a charm to Jane's least movement; she was more energetic and less timid;

but she had sympathy — true sympathy; the tone of her voice, when speaking to the children, was gentle and alluring; to Katharine she was cordial, almost to affection; and to her brother, reverent and thoughtful. Katharine had always trusted to Jane's discrimination of character, yet a weight had been upon her mind greater than she knew till it was taken from her. Now she felt that, humanly speaking, the little ones would be safe; and for Colonel Forbes, he could but be left to God's comfort; none else could reach him. He was very wretched, Katharine could well see that; wretched even in his wish to do right. His work was to begin alone, and with the burden of a regretful past crushing his spirit. But he did not shrink from it; he went on steadily, allowing nothing to escape, putting forth the power of his strong will for self-control in small things as well as great; labouring, almost painfully in Katharine's eyes, to live for others now, as once he had lived for self. The feelings which influenced him must have been very deep, but they were never alluded to. Jane's picture hung in his room, and a lock of her hair was always next his heart; but the gaze which rested upon the one, the kisses so passionately, and, at first, almost despairingly, bestowed upon the other, were never known.

He was pitied. People said it was a grievous loss, but they added that it was fortunate for him to have a person so estimable as Miss Forbes to replace it. The tale attached to the loss — the spring which had been touched for Eternity was not thought of, at least, at first. Time wore on, and it was said that Colonel Forbes was changed; that, he who had once been proud, was now humble; he who had once been severe, had now learnt to be lenient; that the rigid landlord had become the kind friend; and the ostentatious patron of benevolence, the secret, untiring benefactor; that the stern master was changed into the careful adviser and guide; the exacting head of the family, into the patient, forbearing, tender father. But this was in other and distant years, and our path lies with the present.

Katharine Ashton was free. Her task was done. She had taken the straightforward path of obedience to an outward call, and it had led her through much trial, to a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Katharine, indeed, could not see all that she had been permitted to do; nor how, by working in the place which God had appointed for her, she had influenced those above her; but she felt that there was nothing upon her conscience to regret, or to cast a shadow over the sense of great happiness, which, by slow degrees, as the sun steals upon the twilight, was again dawning upon her.

By degrees, for she could not realise it all at once,—that was not to be expected. And Charles did not expect it. Jane's death, so long anticipated, was a grief to be softened by time, but never forgotten; and anxiety for the children and Colonel Forbes occupied much of Katharine's thoughts. But Charles was very patient with her, and was quite willing to meet her wish of remaining at Maplestead until Miss Forbes should be permanently settled there; and in the mean time a care of a different kind had arisen, which in some degree was useful, as serving to give a new turn to Katharine's ideas.

Letters from Australia arrived very unsatisfactory. John was speculating, as usual. His land was by no means what he had hoped, and required more money spent upon it than he could command. He had suddenly thrown it all into Henry Madden's hands, and embarked in a new undertaking, which, of course, like every thing else at the beginning, was sure to succeed. In the mean time he was begging Katharine to further his plans by advancing money. The letter was written in a very uncomfortable, anxious tone, in spite of his sanguine assurances; and a postscript by Selina said, that whatever might be the prospects for the future, which John was always talking of, the present was as bad as bad could be.

"What is to be the end of that, Charles?" said Katharine, as she put the letter into his hands one evening. It was the last evening that she was to spend at Maplestead. On the next day she was to take up her residence with the Miss Ronaldsons, in Rilworth, preparatory to her marriage. Charles looked grave, but not anxious: "The end will be what we have all along foreseen," he said; "so it will not take us by surprise. He will come back to England." "But how, and when?" "No need to think of that, dearest, except so far as it troubles you."—"It troubles me mostly for the children," said Katharine; "he and Selina carved out their own fate, and they must abide by it. But the little ones:—you know, Charles, I was always a dreadfully weak aunt in my fondness for them."—"You shall be a weak aunt still, if you will," he replied; "and I will be a weak uncle. Katharine, you know they could never be houseless as long as we have a roof to shelter them." Katharine smiled gratefully. "Thank you, dearest; I felt you would say that; but I do not think so much of the boys. They will be able to struggle on well enough by themselves; but that poor little Clara, my god-child, brought up so carelessly, and with no prospect of any thing except marriage."—"Would you wish for any thing better?" said

Charles, laughing. Katharine laughed too. "Nothing better if it is a woman's voluntary choice, and she has had plenty of time to think about it; and nothing worse, if she is forced into it, because it is all she has to look to. I do believe earnestly that one of the things most essential for a woman's goodness and happiness, is to be independent of marriage. So Charles," she added playfully, "the first lesson I would teach little Clara, if I had to educate her, would be that she need not necessarily follow my example." — "As you will," he said, "as long as you don't think it necessary to preach the same doctrine to yourself; but, Katharine, dearest, do you think it would be possible to persuade John to part with her, at least, for a time, till he can see better how his affairs are likely to prosper? We would give her a good Colonial education, and send her out again to them if they wanted her." Katharine paused. "You don't like the notion?" he said anxiously. "I like it dearly, because it comes from you, and is just like you," said Katharine heartily; "but I see so many reasons why she should remain with them, that there is only one thing which would make me agree to it." — "Her mother?" said Charles. "Yes. How well you guess! I have such a dread of Selina's way of educating, or rather not educating." — "John will seize upon the notion," said Charles; "he has such an opinion of you." — "And it will be one care off his mind," said Katharine. — "Then we will offer it. It is all we can do. We cannot send him money." — "No," said Katharine, quickly; "that would be only adding fuel to the flame; all one longs for is to stop his spirit of speculation." — "And if he once feels that he can come to us for money, there will be no means of stopping it, I am afraid," said Charles; "so in spite of ourselves we must be hard-hearted; but that notion is a relief to me. The letter weighed upon my spirits, and I want no weights now." — "Neither do I," said Katharine, affectionately; "I have been longing so for my walk this evening, and thinking how pretty Westbank would look, and how nice it would be to see the new furniture in it. After all, Charles, I am afraid I am something of a child yet." Charles smiled. That was the first thing which struck me in you years ago," he said; "I like people who know how to be happy, and you always were happy." Katharine considered: "Yes, I thought I was. I was so really, in a way, but I did not know then what happiness might be." "Nor how lasting, we will pray and believe," said Charles, thoughtfully; and Katharine took his arm, and they set out for their walk.

"Westbank is like Moorlands, only smaller," said Charles, as

they entered the garden ; "and it suits me better for that reason." — "The church is farther off at Moorlands," observed Katharine ; "that was always in my eyes one of the charms of Westbank, having the church so close." — "And Maplestead in full view," added Charles ; "how well it looks amongst the trees." Katharine moved a few steps, that she might see the window of what had once been Jane's bed-room. "Her rest is sweeter now than it ever was then," she said, turning to Charles, and almost involuntarily she walked towards the churchyard, which was separated from the garden by a narrow lane.

They stood by Jane's grave. It was marked by a large stone, with a recumbent cross ; a few flowers were springing up around it. Katharine remained by it in silence. A rush of sorrow came over her, and her heart seemed full, as if it would burst. She did not hear the gate open again, and she saw no one. Suddenly Charles drew her aside, and she looked up. Colonel Forbes had just entered the church-yard. "We will go out by the other gate," said Charles, walking on before her. Katharine turned away, yet cast one lingering look upon the grave : Colonel Forbes quickened his pace towards her, and she stood still to meet him. She thought he had something to say ; and he did come up to her, and began in that strained, cold voice, which now so often made her tremble for the volcano of feeling working inwardly. "Miss Ashton, you leave us to-morrow ?" — "I am afraid so, sir," said Katharine. He paused, twice essayed to speak again, and failed. At last, stooping down, he gathered from his wife's grave the bud of an early rose, and giving it to her, said, "Keep it, and think of me in your prayers ;" and then wringing Katharine's hand convulsively, he turned away.

She did not see him again till she had left Maplestead for ever.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE change from Maplestead to the long, low, sunny parlour in the Miss Ronaldsons' house, how great it was ! And how different were the mournful looks of every one in the large, luxurious mansion, from the warm, happy, maternal kiss of Mrs. Ronaldson and the hearty delight of Miss Ronaldson, and the quick, Argus-eyed affection of Miss Priscilla.

It was a new life to Katharine, and a new life to those who were to receive her.

To be sure!—such a strange world—as Miss Ronaldson observed, whilst they were standing talking together, soon after Katharine's arrival: who would have thought it? And Katharine, too, to have played them such a trick!—to be saying “yes,” when they all thought she was saying “no.”—“But I knew it—I am sure I knew it,” said Miss Priscilla; I guessed it at least if I did not know it. Don't you remember sister, how I said to you, after Katharine was here that day with Charlie, that they were so odd I couldn't make them out, and that I thought they had their heads full of something.” “Yes, Prissy, certainly—I remember quite well; and I said I wished it had been their hearts; and you said they were too old for that.” “No, my dear; no, sister, I assure you,” interrupted Miss Priscilla. “When did I say that? When could I ever think people were too old to have hearts? What I said was—I forget now exactly, but I know I thought their heads were full.” “And that they were too old to be thinking of such folly as falling in love, I dare say, Aunt Priscilla,” said Charles, laughing; “but you see the wisest folks may be mistaken. And now I want you to take great care of Kate, and carry her to all the shops in Rilworth this afternoon, or we shall have some delays, because the grand dress is not ready for next Tuesday.” “The grand dress is to come home on Saturday evening, Charles,” said Katharine. “Don't distress yourself about that; and you shall see it on if you like it; and for your comfort, I will promise you it shall not be white satin.” “White satin! no, my dear, of course not!” said Miss Ronaldson. “Why, Mrs. George Andrews wore white satin.” “And had six bridesmaids, and flowers strewn in the churchyard,” added Miss Priscilla. “And my Kate would not at all like to compete with Mrs. George Andrews,” said Mrs. Ronaldson, kindly. “Kate is not very fond of competing with any one,” said Katharine, laughing, “as she is almost certain of failure. But, Charles, I really do want to make you curious about the dress, and you won't be.” “And yet you know it is to be your mother's present, Charles,” said Miss Priscilla. “The very reason why I am not curious,” observed Charles; “because I know it will be precisely what it ought to be. Besides I look forward to seeing Katharine come forward like a new star.”—“In pale lavender silk,” said Miss Priscilla, gravely.—“And a straw bonnet,” added Miss Ronaldson; “though I am not so sure that is right.”

“It is right because I like it, dear Aunt Rebecca,” said Katharine. “You don't care, Charles, do you? I have an objection to the thought of seeing myself in a white silk bonnet.”—

"Such as you used to have to the white muslin and pink bows," said Charles. "You see, Katharine, I know more of the secrets of your early life than you imagined."—"That was because Selina was such a gossip," said Katharine.—"And because he would always talk about you, my dear," said Mrs. Ronaldson. "But seriously, Charles, we do all think the straw bonnet is a little too demure."—"Katharine shall do as she pleases," he replied. "But what is the objection, Kate, to the white silk? I thought it was a regular part of the ceremony. It always has been at every wedding that I have seen."—Katharine laughed heartily. "I should not so much care," she said, "if after I came out of church, I might dig a hole and bury the bonnet. But the thing I object to is being seen in it afterwards, and pointed out as a bride; and it struck me that if I were to have a straw bonnet—you know, Aunt Priscilla, it may be a very good one of its kind—I might take out the orange flowers and the other finery which I suppose I must have, and make it like any other person's, and then nobody would know any thing about it. But I don't really care; I would wear twenty white bonnets to please you," she said, laying her hand affectionately on Charles's shoulder. He turned round and gave her a kiss. "Wear any thing you like, my darling: you will be first in my eyes whatever it may be."

So the straw bonnet was decided on, and in the afternoon Katharine and Miss Priscilla went to choose it; and Charles drove his mother over to Westbank to make some final arrangements about the house.

They were very busy days—receiving presents, writing notes of thanks and invitations, seeing visitors, trying on dresses, arranging the wedding breakfast. Charles and Katharine did not spend much of their time alone; and now and then, when going to bed very tired, Katharine was forcibly reminded of the fatigues of similar events in the old times, and her thankfulness that weddings did not come every day. Betsy Carter and the eldest Miss Locke were to be her bridesmaids; her cousin, Mr. Davis, who with his wife was invited to Rilworth especially for the occasion, was to give her away; and Mr. Reeves was to marry them, and with Mrs. Reeves to join them at the breakfast. Katharine did not ask this herself, but it was the offer of genuine affection and respect. Charles and Katharine afterwards were to start for the North, Charles wishing to introduce her to his former home and his numerous friends. Katharine might have felt this excitement painfully after her quiet, sorrowful life at

Maplestead, but that, as usual, she was so full of thought for others that she had no leisure to give to herself. Her great anxiety now was that the Miss Ronaldsons should not be overtasked by all that was going on; and half the discussions which would naturally have been settled in their presence, took place in a little back room, between herself and Charles, and Mrs. Ronaldson. Katharine felt very much for the latter. Notwithstanding Mrs. Ronaldson's satisfaction in seeing her son married, her own home was broken up by it, for she would not consent to live with them. Young married people, she said, ought to have a home to themselves; they would never understand each other properly if they had not; and it was very difficult for parents to keep from interfering and giving advice, and that caused jars and unpleasant feelings. No, she would remain with her sisters-in-law for the present, as they were kind enough to say they would like to have her; and then, by-and-by, she might find a cottage near Westbank to suit her. At any rate she was living in her native place, and amongst old friends; and with such a son as Charles, and such a daughter as Katharine at hand, she could never feel lonely.

That name of daughter was very dear to Katharine. It seemed to bring back buried feelings, old joys and hopes, which she had fancied would never find their object in this world again. She was a true daughter even then, in the midst of the excitement of her life, and the absorbing affection which every hour became more dear to her. Mrs. Ronaldson was never forgotten either by her or by Charles. She was always consulted, and her opinion deferred to. They never allowed her to feel solitary, or as if she was set aside. She was the sun around which they moved together; and tenderly, the evening before the marriage, as Katharine, sitting at Mrs. Ronaldson's feet, was recounting the little incidents of the day for her amusement, she bent over her, and blessing her, whispered, "There are many Orpahs in the world, my child, but few Ruths like you."

Brightly shone the sun on Katharine Ashton's wedding day, and joyous and hearty were the kind wishes and congratulations of the friends assembled in Miss Ronaldson's long parlour.

And there sat Miss Ronaldson herself, in a cherry-coloured silk gown, rejoicing in her hearty benevolence, in doing the honours of reception as the mistress of the house; and there moved Miss Priscilla, cherry-coloured also, but more youthful, in lace and white ribbons, eager, excited, and nervous, determined that every thing should go right, yet prepared to bear up bravely if all

should go wrong. And there, from time to time appeared Deborah, to receive whispered orders about jellies and cakes, and to beg that Miss Priscilla would just step out for one minute, to see about setting it all out in the back parlour, or to inform her, in a loud under tone, that Miss Carter and Miss Locke were come, and had gone upstairs to see Miss Ashton.

Five times had Deborah made her appearance on different errands, and three times, at least, had Miss Priscilla offered a hasty excuse for leaving the company, begging them to remember that Deborah was not accustomed to such gay doings, so, of course, she wanted a little training. Time was passing on. It was nearly half-past nine; and at ten precisely the carriages had been ordered to take them to church. Once more Deborah made her appearance: "Miss Priscilla, ma'am; Miss Priscilla!"—the sibilation was audible at the furthest extremity of the room.—"A wonderful basket of fruit, ma'am, from Maplestead, and a note: will you please come and see?"—"A what, sister?" said Miss Ronaldson, who was at a little distance. "Never mind, my dear; don't trouble yourself. Yes, Deborah, I'll come,—our kind friends won't care; never mind, my dear;"—and with another oracular nod, which only had the effect of aggravating Miss Ronaldson's curiosity, Miss Priscilla adjourned to the back parlour. "A wonderful basket! you may well say, Deborah,—such flowers! and early strawberries, I declare, and melons, and pines: did you ever see such a show? Well! was there ever any thing like it? What shall we do with it all? Turn out that dish of biscuits, and put the strawberries at the corner; and, oh dear! there's the clock striking the half hour, and the fly will be here—and what shall we do?"—"And there's the note, ma'am," said Deborah. "The note!—where? I had quite forgotten; and it's to Katharine too, I must take it to her. Deborah, I'll send Miss Carter down to you, and you, and she, and William from the Bear, must help to put out the dishes, and dress them with the flowers, as you can. To think of Katharine's having such a present of fruit so late on her wedding day!" "The man made an excuse who brought it," said Deborah—"I don't know whose fault it was; but Colonel Forbes told him he was to say that it ought to have come an hour ago."—"An hour or two hours, there's not much difference," said Miss Priscilla; "nobody ever was ready on a wedding day, that I ever heard of. But I'm not down-hearted, Deborah—don't think so; it will all come to an end, if we live long enough. Here, give me the note."

Miss Priscilla hastily ascended the staircase, and knocked at

Katharine's door. "Kate, my dear—sister—Mrs. Ronaldson—Betsy—please somebody open." Katharine herself came to the door. She was alone, dressed—very calm—very pale. Miss Priscilla forgot her errand in the pleasure of looking at her.

It might have given pleasure to any one. Simple, pure-minded, unselfish, her character was written on her countenance at all times; on her bridal morning and in her bridal dress, with her bright face softened yet not shaded by serious thought and the traces of earnest prayer, Katharine Ashton might almost have laid claim to beauty.

A tear dimmed Aunt Priscilla's eye: "God bless you, my child, and give you a happy life, for I am sure you deserve it"—and she folded her in her arms, and kissed her again and again; and then the tear was dashed hastily away, and Miss Priscilla was herself again. "Here's a present for you, my love, just come—a basket of fruit and flowers from Maplestead—wonderful melons and pines, and splendid geraniums; the Colonel must quite have robbed his greenhouse and hothouses. And stay, here's a note too; that was just what I came for, besides wanting to ask Betsy Carter to go downstairs, and see about a few things for me in the back parlour. Where in the world is she gone to?"—"She and Mary Locke are doing something to their dresses in Mrs. Ronaldson's room," said Katharine, as she broke the seal with a trembling hand. Miss Priscilla was going, but stayed to pick up a paper which had fallen on the floor. "Katharine, what is this?" Katharine took it, and her countenance changed; she trembled and sat down: "Nothing, Aunt Priscilla,—please don't mind; I will tell you by-and-by. Can I see Charles?" Her voice was broken and agitated. "See him? yes, to be sure. But nothing is the matter, I hope." "Oh! no, indeed—nothing; only if I might see him;—I must—if you would only ask him to come to me." Miss Priscilla wondered for a moment more, and went downstairs.

Katharine's impatience would not suffer her to sit down. She stood in the doorway, listening for Charles's step. He came in a minute, and she threw herself into his arms. "Oh! Charles, it is too much. Why did he think of it?" and she put the envelope into his hand.

It contained, not a note from Colonel Forbes, but a slip of paper, on which was written, "A legacy of gratitude and love from J. F." With it was enclosed a bank bill for five hundred pounds.

Katharine was pale, more agitated, less able to think of others when she went downstairs than those who knew her well had

expected. Charles hurried her into the carriage, and whispered to his mother not to speak to her; and by the time they reached the church she had recovered her ordinary self-command.

There was a crowded church — crowded not so much with the rich as the poor; the many whom Katharine had known and aided, for whom she had prayed and worked, and who now were earnest in their prayers that Katharine Ronaldson might be as happy as Katharine Ashton deserved to be: whilst with them gathered others also who had memories of old times, and long-remembered feelings of respect for her father and her mother, and the days when the name of Ashton had been influential in Rilworth. It was very strange to Katharine to be the centre of all thought and interest, to be what Jane had been on her wedding-day; — that day which flashed across her mind, as she walked up the centre aisle, as vividly as if it had been only yesterday. The tale of that marriage had been told; her own was but beginning. Did she tremble?

One glance at Charles, and, oh! what a thrill of confiding, grateful happiness accompanied it; and then, sincere, earnest as she was in every other action of her life, forgetting all but the Great God in whose presence the vow was made, Katharine gave herself to him, in whom every earthly wish was now centred, “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, to love, to cherish, and obey till death.”

A yet more solemn rite followed; and when others had risen and were departed, Katharine and Charles still knelt side by side, lingering in the enjoyment of that Peace of God, passing understanding, which, through His Mercy, had been granted them in His Holy Communion.

In that Sacred Presence we will leave them. The Blessing of God was upon them, and for what further happiness need we seek?

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